Helping the invisible children

Evaluation Report
2011

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List of acronyms

CBS – Community-Based Services

CCS – Community Consultative Structure

CMTIS – Child Monitoring and Tracking Information System

DGASPC – General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection

DAC – Development Assistance Committee

NGO – Non-governmental organization

NUTS – Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

SPAS – Public Social Assistance Service (within mayoralty)

UNICEF – The United Nations Children's Fund

USD – United States dollar

FOREWORD

This evaluation report of a UNICEF-supported programme in prevention goes beyond the measurement of results and tackles systemic issues related to the way social assistance functions at community level, particularly in rural areas. It provides evidence which can be used to guide the reform of the social protection system as a whole in a cost-effective, efficient and relevant manner.

In recent years, Romania has seen a rise in poverty rates and vulnerability, especially among children in rural areas. In concert with this, large numbers of children continue to be separated from their natural families or subjected to various forms of violence. The protection system has been working hard to cope but it has become clear that the most effective way to make a difference is to promote actions that keep children in the family rather than in the protection system. It's cheaper, more effective and more in line with a child rights approach.

Both the Romanian Government and UNICEF agree that prevention is much better than protection. Providing support to children and families in the community to deal, to the extent possible, with the main reasons why children end up in the protection system is more affordable and gets better outcomes for children and their families than the alternative of being in the State care system. The reasons include physical and mental violence, injury, neglect, exploitation, physical and sexual abuse, and family separation. Prevention is also more in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child with its fundamental principle of "the best interests of the child".

The "Helping the Invisible Children"(HIC) project is founded on principles which include: i) the fulfilment of developmental rights is fundamental not only for children but also for the communities in which they live; ii) focusing on rural areas is an important means of reaching the most vulnerable and deprived; iii) a cross-sectoral approach is needed to make an enduring impact; iv) partnering with stakeholders at all levels ensures buy-in and commitment; and v) wide coverage ensures critical mass, which in turn influences processes related to policy reform.

At the core of the project lies a cost-efficient approach which aims to guarantee access to appropriate education, health and social services for boys and girls. To address these complex issues, strong partnerships have been developed with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection through its General Directorate for Child Protection, the General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection, and the Institution of Prefectures in 8 counties and Public Local Authorities from 96 disadvantaged communes.

HIC is very relevant to the Government's National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights (2008-2013) and the evaluation provides concrete evidence which can be used to make the strategy more effective.

The main lines of action envisaged in the short and medium term are: i) gaining an understanding of the minimum package of services needed at local level, based on the principle of cost-effectiveness, feasibility and appropriateness to the Romanian reality; ii) understanding the main legislative gaps and measures which need to be taken in the area of social assistance in order to effectively implement prevention measures at community level; and iii) promoting public debate on the most suitable measures to be taken at central level, including targeted allocation of funding at local level based on principles of responsible expenditure of state resources to benefit the most excluded children and families.

All these measures need commitment from various stakeholders belonging to different sectors. In this regard, UNICEF and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection are committed to working together to convene and influence those who can really make a difference. The voices of children must also be taken into consideration when considering reform in any area relevant to their rights.

In a year when the Romanian Government will send its 5th Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, we are convinced that this evaluation report, together with other relevant studies and research, will contribute to the development of more effective strategies to make the Convention of the Rights of the Child a reality in the lives of all Romanian children.

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UNICEF Romania

Contents

Helping
the
invisible
children

Executive summary

Background

The project is part of the UNICEF's Community Based Services (CBS) Programme in Romania. The CBS focus is on the preventive approach in social protection system, especially in rural areas. The purpose of the project 'Helping the invisible children' is to increase the impact of social protection policies for poor and socially excluded ('invisible') children and families. The project has employed external or internal social workers in 96 communes from eight counties (Bacău, Botoșani, Buzău, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui and Vrancea). Within the project, at the community level, the social workers have multiple responsibilities including community census (to identify cases of vulnerable children) and, correspondingly, identify and put into practice solutions to their problems with the help of the Community Consultative Structure (CCS).[1] Coordination of activities at the county level is ensured by a supervisor from the County General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC). Another stakeholder at county level is the Prefecture,[2] whose role has been mainly of enabling communication with the local communities and advice on selecting the communities to be part of the project.

The evaluation comes at a key-moment, helping the project to reshape in the second year of implementation. However, given the short period of implementation (4.5 months), the timing of the evaluation has been a challenge for both evaluators as well as evaluated stakeholders.

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this evaluation is to collect evidence related to both project effectiveness and efficiency, contributing to the understanding of its relevance and impact. In this respect, there are two main objectives to be attained:

1. Measure the project effectiveness and efficiency as well as estimate the potential impact of the project activities, on the one hand, on the local stakeholders (identified vulnerable children) and on the other hand, on the services provided at local level, all based on an analysis taking into account the local specificities determined by geographical, demographic, social and economic criteria.

2. Identify and extract relevant elements necessary for the policy development in the prevention area (information related to legislation, institutional building, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms) with a particular focus on the definition of a minimum package of basic social services.

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[1] They include local decision-makers such as the mayor/vicemayor, secretary of the mayoralty, social worker, doctor, policeman, school representative, priest, etc. Although they are set on paper in the Romanian legislation, the CCS were not really functioning in most localities at the start of the project.

[2] The Prefect is the Government's representative in the territory. The Prefecture's main role is to observe fulfillment of legal acts issued by the local authorities.

Methodology

The evaluation framework follows the OECD/DAC criteria on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, connectedness and coherence.

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research tools. Some of the information has been collected during project implementation (questionnaires completed by the social workers, supervisors' reports), while most of the information has been produced with the special purpose of this evaluation (synthetic fiche, interviews, focus-groups, case-studies and opinion survey). The evaluation covers all key stakeholders, all counties and all communities. The coverage is exhaustive for the instruments related to database aggregation and analysis (census questionnaires, supervisors' reports and Synthetic Fiche) and interviews with county stakeholders. When sampling methods were used, they took into account geographical and case-diversity criteria (focus-groups and case-studies) and opinion survey (representative sample based on typology derived from community development and cases of vulnerable children).

The following data collection sources have been used:

(1) the questionnaires completed and entered in a common database by the social workers within communities;

(2) the supervisors' reports offered quantitative and qualitative information on the degree of completeness of each of the social worker's activity from their job description;

(3) interviews with county stakeholders (DGASPC and Prefecture), which covered all counties and addressed issues on key strengths, main problems, assessment of project effectiveness and efficiency in the county and co-operation with the local authorities;

(4) focus-groups with the social workers employed in the project, which were conducted in Iași, Vrancea, Bacău and Botoșani. The participants were asked to comment on each project activity and detail how it has been carried out in their community.

(5) opinion survey with community representatives, which used a sampling based on a community typology derived from two criteria: community development index (used for the initial selection of communities) and the number of cases of vulnerable children.

(6) community case-studies, which were selected considering geographical and case-diversity criteria. The most relevant community representatives (social workers in and out the project, mayoralty, school, police, church, other CCS members) participated by giving information about how the project was implemented in their commune.

(7) the Synthetic Fiche including updated reports about the social workers' activities until November 1st, 2011. The Synthetic Fiche includes indicators referring to new vulnerable cases (number of cases identified, types of vulnerabilities and types of solutions for the vulnerable cases), community census (data collection and data entry) and activity of the Consultative Commission Structures.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The project is considered as highly relevant, effective and efficient both according to the stakeholders' opinions as well as according to the performance indicators. Both sustainability and connectedness should be of special concern in the next phase of the project.

The project is considered **highly relevant** by all types of stakeholders. All stakeholders agree that the project objectives are still valid. Also, there is a consensus over the fact that the project activities and outputs are consistent with the intended intermediate outcomes as well as with the overall goal. More precisely, the activities completed in the first months of project contributed to building capacity at mayoralty level to identify 'invisible' children and to provide them support. The community census represents the most relevant project activity during the evaluated period.

The project is considered **very effective** by most stakeholders. Concerning the objective on identification of 'invisible' children, most stakeholders agree that it has been attained, while on the solutions identified for their support, substantial progress is still needed. This should be the priority of the next phase of the project. In the short period of project implementation, a part of identified cases were resolved; thus, the project has made 'a real difference' for 326 of its direct beneficiaries, 'invisible' children and their families. Given the allocated resources (financial, time and human), the current impact of the project can be considered as being high.

In both economic terms and stakeholders' opinions, the project is **very efficient**. The project is perceived 'like a breath of fresh air, dealing with real problems of real people'. A rough estimates of 'per capita costs' (the project budget divided to the number of beneficiaries) indicates that the current cost per child benefiting of preventive measures is several times lower than the cost per child in protection (the cost per child in a day care centre – as a form of prevention – is at least 3 times higher and the cost in a residential centre – as a form of protection in specialized units – is at least 10 times higher).

The project's problematic areas are sustainability and connectedness. Most communes, particularly the poor and underdeveloped ones, are characterized by high needs (high number of identified 'invisible' children) and low or very scarce resources. The budgetary and staff sustainability need to be addressed. The potential sustainability is significantly higher for communes with project social workers already employed by mayoralty compared to those with external social workers. Also, the likelihood that the Community Consultative Structures (CCSs) will continue to be functional after the project ends is highly dependent on the existence of the social worker trained in the project.

The achievement of the project's objectives and final goal strongly depends on how will be tackled the lack or poor expertise at the local level, the low level of awareness and knowledge on social problems, the generalized tolerant attitudes towards alcohol abuse, violence or school dropout of both population and officials, as well as the widespread poverty.

Recommendations

The 'easy' part of the project is finished. The 'invisible' children are no longer invisible. They are here and need solutions to their problems. Resolving as many as possible of these cases is a big challenge for the project's next phases. In order to tackle it, the evaluation supplied a number of ideas, conclusions and recommendations that could smooth the process. So, the 'hardest' part of the project is now beginning.

A set of recommendations were written-up together by evaluators, UNICEF and main counterpart at central level, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection through the General

Directorate for Child Protection. They are structured on two sections: the first one relates to project management and the second one to the policy use of findings.

As indicated by key findings, the project's **effectiveness and efficiency can be improved and UNICEF should have the leading role in this**. They refer to developing activities related to dissemination of information, staff sustainability, monitoring and oversight and developing local commitment of main stakeholders:

- A better dissemination of information both horizontally and vertically. This may be complemented through a more cross-sectoral approach and experiences exchanges,

- Explicit calculation of financial impact of hiring social workers on yearly basis is needed in order to advocate for employment of the social workers by the state,

- The local commitment of stakeholders may be improved if particular emphasis is put on concrete work of the Community Consultative Structures,

- Although it is a long-time approach there should be envisaged actions to build local capacities in addressing knowledge, attitudes and practices at community level,

- The monitoring of the project during the second year may be improved through more standardized procedures and tools, as used during the evaluation process.

On the policy side, the information gathered under this evaluation will be used as an **advocacy tool in partnership with the MoLFSP and the General Directorate for Child Protection to develop the prevention side of social assistance system**, including allocation of resources, development and effective implementation of the minimum package of basic services at community level:

- Strategic use of main project asset: prevention is not only better than protection but also much cheaper. This is main argument when deciding to influence resources allocation,

- Advocate for a minimum package of basic services based on concrete evidences and responding to concrete realities, as they are actually in terms of economic and social characteristics of the population in need,

- Adapt job-profiles of the social workers accordingly to effective needs on the ground in social assistance area, with a particular focus on outreach activities in opposition with the classical bureaucratic tasks of managing social benefits folders.

The main lesson learned from the project is that at present in Romania, the 'invisible' children are a fact. In only 96 communes, more than 3,000 'invisible' children were identified. How many others are expecting to be reached and helped in the other 2,765 communes of the country? The decision-makers at the local and national levels should be made aware of this fact… the 'invisible' children need help.

1   Project Profile

1.1   Context

The project 'Helping the invisible children' targets the situation of children who are 'disappearing from view within their families, communities and societies and to governments, donors, civil society, the media and even other children' (UNICEF, 2006, p. 35). Their right to protection is constantly violated. There are several factors contributing to this situation: lack of identification papers, cases of abuse and neglect, including human trafficking and child labour, inadequate protection of children without parental care, cases of children into adult roles (early marriage, military conflict, hazardous labour, etc.).

As these children are 'invisible' for different institutions at community level, their identification requires a complex approach. The current child protection systems have registered considerable progress regarding the protective side, whereas the preventive side has remained seriously underdeveloped. The project aim and objectives are highly compliant with the provisions of the UNICEF *Child Protection Strategy*, which states that the successful child protection begins with prevention. Specifically for this reason, UNICEF Romania supported several initiatives focused on the preventive approach. The Community Based Services (CBS) Programme is one of them. It has been implemented, shaped and reshaped in order to become as appropriate as possible for the Romanian realities from rural areas.

At the institutional core of this approach is the Public Social Assistance Services (SPAS after the Romanian acronym) from the mayoralties in rural areas, as the main provider of both services and social benefits at local level. The way the SPAS are functioning impacts the whole system. In this regard, evaluating the way in which SPAS are working 'on the ground' in some of the poorest communities from one of the less developed Europe's region represents a valuable information for decision-makers.

In terms of the regulatory framework, Romania has adopted a National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights (2008-2013). The Strategy highlights the importance of community - consultative structures, parents and family - for the child's well being and correspondingly, the need for development of prevention mechanisms instead of interventions in specialized services.[3] Still, the monitoring mechanisms rely on a system with severe deficiencies at local level.[4] This is why, bringing the 'invisible' children into the spot light might be used as input information for the reform envisaged in relation to the Ministry's Child Monitoring and Tracking Information System (CMTIS).

Moreover, the Government includes among its priorities in the field of Family, Child Protection and Equality of Chances, the goal of 'increasing the quality of life for the vulnerable children and fulfilment of minimum quality standards in the services for the children in difficulty'.[5] Generally, the 'invisible' children accumulate vulnerabilities on several dimensions hence improving their quality of life requires a complex approach, which the UNICEF project is trying to put into practice for almost 100 communities from Romania. If considered a successful practice, the project might be scaled up for responding to the pressing social needs of children.

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[3] National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights, p.2, www.copii.ro
[4] The system centralizes the information at county level, however not in a standard manner and not from all mayoralties. The informatic system is based on indicators, which need to be updated according to the current legislation. Source: interview with the General Director for Child Protection, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection.
[5] Government's Priorities for 2012, http://www.gov.ro/prioritatile-anului-2012-br-capitolul-9-familia-protectia-copilului-si-egalitatea-de-sanse__l1a116016.html. The same goal is to be found in the newly enacted Strategy for reforming the social assistance, 2011.

The current reform of the Romanian social protection system envisages challenging policy goals. The main preoccupation refers to the reduction of public expenditures. Under the same chapter of Family, Child Protection and Equality of Chances, the Government announces among its priorities, 'continuing the rationalization process of different types of social assistance șbenefitsț for families as well as for individuals'.[6] For the case of 'invisible' children this goal can have positive but also negative effects. The positive ones take into account that the reduction of public expenditures would be obtained through the development of a preventive approach, which on the one hand, might improve efficiency, and on the other hand, would increase the 'invisible' children's chances of becoming 'visible'. The negative effects view the reduction of social expenditures as causing a decline of the number of beneficiaries of social services without differentiation on their cost or purpose, particularly under conditions of severe budgetary constraints and poor institutional capacities of the local authorities. Consequently, the number of 'invisible' children would most probably increase.

1.2   Project purpose and objectives

The purpose of the project 'Helping the invisible children' is **to increase the impact of social protection policies for poor and socially excluded ('invisible') children and families**, based on the following objectives: i) Strengthening the national strategy for prevention services in terms of effectiveness and efficiency; ii) Increasing the national capacity to deliver basic services with emphasis on identification of children and families at risk and strengthening the monitoring and assessment mechanisms and iii) Extending, in the end, access to essential services to 30,000 poor, excluded, vulnerable children.

1.3   Geographical coverage

The 'Helping the invisible children' project, as part of the larger CBS Programme, consists in developing the institutional capacity to provide social assistance preventive services in rural areas. For this purpose, social workers were employed in 96 communes from 8 counties.[7] The project includes all six counties of the North-East development region (Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava and Vaslui) and two counties from the South-East region (Buzău and Vrancea).[8]

The methodology for the selection of communes was developed and applied in the early stages of project implementation (Stănculescu et al., 2011).[9] The question guiding the selection process was to identify which are the communities where on the one hand, the project is mostly needed in terms of social vulnerabilities and, on the other hand, the project has more success chances, mainly related to the mayoralty's attitude towards social problems. The methodology consisted of a theoretical selection (based on quantitative indicators), validated through interviews with the stakeholders at the county level: General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) and Prefecture. Thus, 96 communes were selected either poor or developed but with a relatively high number of children in need of protection (lack of ID, neglect, abuse, child labour etc.). In each of the 8 counties were selected 11 (Buzău, Iași, Neamț, Suceava) or 13 communes (Bacău, Botoșani, Vaslui, Vrancea).

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[6] Ibidem.
[7] The project is expected to be extended next year to an additional 4 counties and the corresponding communes.
[8] The North-East region and the Macroregion 2 (grouping North-East and South-East regions) are among the poorest in Europe. Source: Eurostat database, At-risk-of-poverty rate by NUTS region [ilc_li41], date of access: December 3, 2011.
[9] See Annex 7.6.

Figure 1 Geographical coverage of project interventions
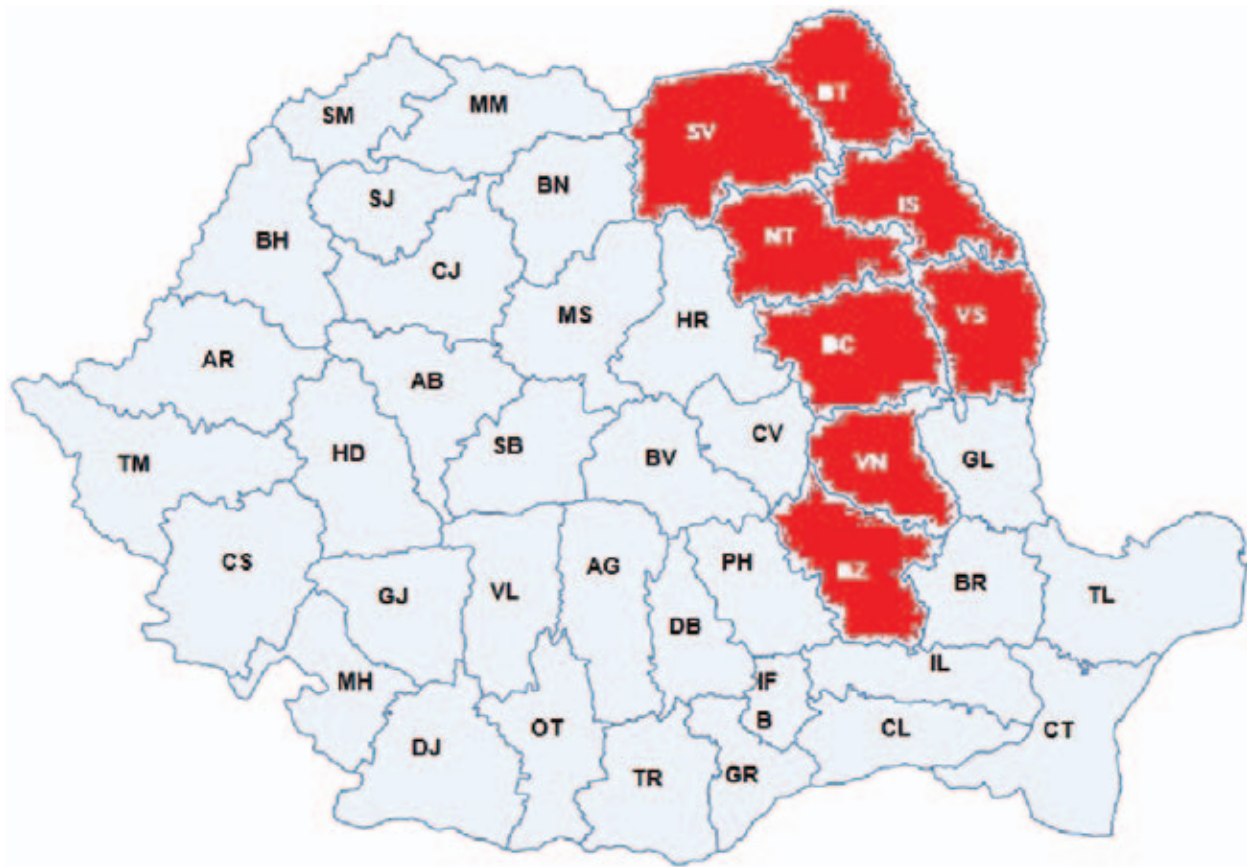
1.4 Stakeholders

Overall, the project covers more than 409 thousands persons, of which over 114 thousands children (0-19 years). The project reaches all major population groups facing various types of vulnerabilities: men and women, all ethnic groups, poor and extremely poor, socially excluded.

Table 1 Project coverage by county (2010)

	Number of communes	Total population	Children 0-14 years	Adolescents 15-19 years	Total children 0-19 years
Bacău	13	57.531	12.681	4.151	16.832
Botoşani	13	60.529	13.018	3.718	16.736
Buzău	11	52.983	8.722	3.209	11.931
Iaşi	11	47.627	10.973	3.645	14.618
Neamţ	11	49.551	9.941	3.779	13.720
Suceava	11	38.993	9.004	3.107	12.111
Vaslui	13	46.000	10.941	3.119	14.060
Vrancea	13	56.596	10.599	3.623	14.222
Total	**96**	**409.810**	**85.879**	**28.351**	**114.230**

Data: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database, www.insse.ro

The key stakeholders implied in this project are located at three layers: national, county and local. At the national level, UNICEF initiated and has financed the project, in close communication with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. At the county level, the key stakeholders comprise DGASPC (Directors and supervisors) and Prefecture. These stakeholders have asymmetric knowledge and responsibilities in the project. The key role belongs to the DGASPC supervisor who coordinates the project activities across the county. The Prefecture representatives have a considerable lower degree of involvement.[10]

At the local level, the key stakeholders include the 'invisible' children and their families (poor or socially excluded). On the institutional side, the Public Social Assistance Service (SPAS), as part of mayoralty, is the primary responsible for social protection at community level. Thus, the local key stakeholders consist of social workers employed in the project, other social workers (in part of the mayoralties included in the project), mayors, vice-mayors, community secretaries, and representatives of the local Consultative Commission (school, police, family doctor, priest or other members of the commune elite).

The interaction between the stakeholders at local level is the key to the success of the project. The county and national level stakeholders are enabling factors for achieving substantial impact at community level.

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[10] The Prefecture representatives were more active in the phase of commune selection. They are expected to play a more important role in the dissemination activities.

1.5 Results chain

In order to enhance the institutional capacity in the provision of preventive social services at the community level, in each commune selected with the project, a social worker was employed for outreaching activities. They were recruited either from the existent staff or outside mayoralty. Accordingly, the social workers employed in the project have been integrated into the organizational structure of mayoralty in varying degrees. Recruitment of social workers outside or inside the mayoralty staff has proved to be an important variable in the assessment of project sustainability, as detailed in the section on *Key Findings.*

Table 2 Social workers employed in the project by county (number)

	External to the mayoralty	Internal to the mayoralty	Total
Bacău	12	1	13
Botoşani	13	0	13
Buzău	2	9	11
Iaşi	7	4	11
Neamţ	8	3	11
Suceava	11	0	11
Vaslui	4	9	13
Vrancea	9	4	13
Total	**67**	**29**	**96**

Data: Interviews with county supervisors, November 2011. Note: External social workers were recruited outside the mayoralty. Internal social workers were part of the mayoralty staff, but not necessarily in the position of social worker.

In the first months of implementation, social workers were selected and trained. They carried out community censuses (data collection, data entry, and data analysis) focused on vulnerable children in all selected communes. As a result, cases of 'invisible' children were identified which were referred to the appropriate institutions. Solutions for various situations of child vulnerability were developed and implemented in some communes.

Figure 2 Project Results Chain

Inputs

Resources
Financial	UNICEF project budget
Material	Desk and computer available for SW
Human[1]	SW, Supervisors, Prefecture representatives, UNICEF, Consultants

Activities

What the project does

Activity[2]	Stakeholders
Selection of communities	Consultants, DGASPC (Supervisor and Director), Prefecture representatives, UNICEF
Selection of SW	DGASPC (Supervisor and Director), Mayor of the selected communes
Training of SW	Consultants, UNICEF
Fiedwork of SW	SW
Monitoring of SW	Supervisors, UNICEF
Identification of "invisible" children	SW
Identificaton and setting up of referral systems for "invisible" children	SW, Community Consultative Structures (School, Police, Mayoralty, Family Doctor, Priest), Family, DGASPC

Outputs

Products or dervices produced
Methodology for selection of communes
SW completing the training courses
Community Census with a special focus on vulnerability
Database of vulnerable children
Analysis reports of community vulnerabilities

Outcomes

Results or effects of outputs
Targeted selection of communes
Increased institutional capacity at mayoralty level
Identified "invisible" children
Solutions for "invisible" children

Impacts

Long-term effects[3]
Increased institutional capacity at community level
Developing prevention side at community level
Decreased incidence of vulnerable children at community level

Notes: Authors' identification of project results chain. SW – Social worker. 1. It does not include, the staff available in the local institutions (for example the members of Community Consultative Structures). 2. It shows sequence of activities up to the moment of this evaluation. 3. It is difficult to speak about long-term effects for a project with such a short period of implementation. However, the mentioned impacts are already achieved in some of the communities included in the project.

2 Evaluation Profile

2.1 Evaluation purpose and objectives

The purpose of this evaluation, in accordance with the ToR, is to collect evidence related to both project effectiveness and efficiency, contributing to the understanding of its relevance and impact. In this respect, there are two main objectives to be attained:

1. Measure the project effectiveness and efficiency as well as estimate the potential impact of the project activities, on the one hand, on the local stakeholders (identified vulnerable children) and on the other hand, on the services provided at local level, all based on an analysis taking into account the local specificities determined by geographical, demographic, social and economic criteria.

2. Identify and extract relevant elements necessary for the policy development in the prevention area (information related to legislation, institutional building, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms) with a particular focus on the definition of a minimum package of basic social services.

This is a formative evaluation, which focuses on the process and informs on improving the programme. As the relevance of the programme is extended across the key stakeholders, the information provided under this report is useful for:

1. UNICEF staff – for it provides evidence on how the project has actually worked in the first months of implementation and informs decision-making on its continuation.

2. Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, General Directorate for Child Protection – for it provides useful information on how is the system of social assistance for child protection implemented at the local level.

3. Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports and Ministry of Health – they are an important duty bearers for child protection; the evaluation is useful for them as it provides evidence on the ways the communities respond to the child's vulnerabilities, including those related to the education and health.

4. County General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection, have, as result of this evaluation, a database of individual cases of 'invisible' children. They can practically add up this valuable information to the monitoring system in place and 'export' the accumulated practices to other communities. They can also see from the report examples of what worked in various communities from other counties.

5. Mayoralties and social workers also have a database of individual cases of 'invisible' children in their communities. They can be informed from the report on the successful or less successful practices at the local level. Especially the social workers can try to undertake innovative solutions for activation of community consultative structures, if informed on success stories.

2.2   Timeframe

The project started in April 2011 and is programmed to end in the last trimester of 2012. This evaluation report covers the period between June[11] and November[12] 2011, which means 4.5 months of effective project implementation.

The evaluation comes at a key-moment, helping the project reshape in the second year of implementation. However, timing of the evaluation was a challenge for both evaluators as well as evaluated stakeholders. The period of 4.5 month, which is evaluated, is short for achieving the desired impact, especially in the field of social development. Fortunately, the key activity of the project (community census for reaching the 'invisible' children) has been finalized in most communities and has provided a strong information basis for the evaluation. It also helped boost achievement of the project intermediary outcomes (e.g. 'invisible' children were identified; solutions for some cases were developed and implemented).

2.3   Framework and criteria

The objectives guiding the evaluation are to provide on the one hand, useful information for reshaping the project in the second year and on the other hand, key elements for policy development in the field of prevention services. In this respect, the evaluation is designed based on a matrix format with 7 criteria of evaluation by 5 types of key stakeholders (figure 3).

The evaluation uses the OECD/DAC criteria, given their systematically proved relevance for evaluating development assistance (OECD, 2010). The research considers the five standard OECD criteria and adds the criteria related to connectedness and coherence. The latter ones, although initially developed in relation to the humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters and to conflicts, have been considered useful in the current context. Connectedness, adapted from the concept of sustainability, provides the linkage between the development assistance and longer term goals, including issues such as the extent to which the local capacity is supported and developed. Coherence refers under this project to policy coherence across sectors, given the multi-dimensionality considered for child's well-being.

The evaluation criteria related to impact and sustainability are in particular used to inform future project planning. They supply evidence on the progress the project has achieved against its desired impact – coverage, 'the difference made for the beneficiaries', institutional response against the identified needs, etc. The insight on sustainability has been taken into account given the UNICEF's intended sequence of activities in this project, namely to cease financing of the social workers' wages starting from January 2012 and not at the very end of the project.[13] This decision is of the highest importance for the project's potential development.

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[11] The social workers participating with the project started fieldwork in the beginning of June, with contracts signed with the mayoralties on June 15.
[12] The evaluation activities - latest updates on community census, opinion survey, interviews, focus-groups and case-studies – carried out in November 2011.
[13] OECD, Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, 2010.

Figure 3 Evaluation framework

Criteria of evaluation	Key stakeholders
1. Relevance of project to local needs 2. Effectiveness 3. Efficiency 4. Impact, including positive and negative changes produced by the project activities 5. Sustainability 6. Connectedness 7. Coherence	1. 'Invisible' children (poor and/or socially excluded) and their families 2. Community representatives, including local decision-makers (mayoralty), community consultative structures and other local professionals (doctor, teachers, police, priest etc.) 3. Social workers employed in the project 4. Supervisors and DGASPC 5. Prefecture representatives

Consequently, the seven evaluation criteria relate to:[14] (1) relevance - the extent to which the project is suited to the needs, priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor; (2) effectiveness - the extent to which the project activities attain its objectives; (3) efficiency - a measure of the outputs (qualitative and quantitative) in relation to the inputs (to what extent the project uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results); (4) impact – the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended; (5) sustainability – a measure of whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after the withdrawal of donor funding; (6) [15]connectedness – the need to ensure that activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account; (7) coherence – the need to assess security, developmental, trade and military policies as well as humanitarian policies, to ensure that there is consistency and, in particular, that all policies take into account humanitarian and human rights considerations.

The specific research questions addressed under each criteria are presented in the corresponding subsections. The limitations given the short period of implementation are acknowledged and considered under each of the criteria.

2.4   Data and method

The complex research questions of the evaluation have required a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, as shown in table 3. Some information has been collected as part of project activities (community censuses completed by the social workers, supervisors' reports). However, most data were collected with the special purpose of this evaluation (synthetic fiche, interviews, focus-groups, case-studies and opinion survey). Fieldwork was carried out in October-November 2011 by the Romanian Center for Economic Modeling.

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[14] As declared to the evaluators.
[15] Definitions (1) to (5) according to DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance, http://www.oecd.org/ document/ 22/0,2340,en_2649_34435_2086550_1_1_1_1,00.html

Table 3 Research design

	DATA SOURCE/ TARGET GROUP	SAMPLING METHOD	VOLUME
Community censuses	Community censuses carried out by the social workers employed in the project at September 15, 2011	Exhaustive	Over 50,000 cases
	Supervisors' Reports at September 15, 2011	Exhaustive	96 reports
	Synthetic Fiche including updated reports about the social workers' activities until November 1, 2011	Exhaustive	96 fiches
Interviews	DGASPC Supervisors	Exhaustive	8 interviews
	DGASPC Directors	Exhaustive	8 interviews
	Prefecture Representatives	Exhaustive	8 interviews
Focus-groups	Social Workers (SWs)	Geographical and case-diversity criteria	4 FG with 31 SWs, from 8 counties
Case-studies *(including interviews with all community key stakeholders)*	■ Beneficiaries: 'invisible' children and their families ■ Mayoralty representatives (mayor, vice mayor, secretary, social worker not participating with the project) ■ Social worker working in the project ■ Community Consultative Structure (including teachers, doctors, policemen, priests etc.) ■ Other local professionals	Geographical and case-diversity criteria	2 case studies + 2 community visits (including 18 interviews with community representatives and 12 households with 'invisible' children)
Opinion Survey	■ Mayoralty representatives (mayor, vice mayor, secretary, social worker not participating with the project) ■ Community Consultative Structure (including teachers, doctors, policemen, priests etc.) ■ Other local professionals	Random sample, stratified according to the county and the community type	167 persons from 41 communes

As part of this evaluation there has been no attempt to construct a counterfactual. The main reason has been related to the fact that during the evaluated period most resources of the project have been allocated for just one activity – community census, which however was not finalized (either fieldwork or data entry in the common database) in some communities. Nonetheless, the basis for a counterfactual has been laid out for the next phase of evaluation. This refers to constructing of an exhaustive database of identified cases of 'invisible' children. In this way, the next evaluation can draw on this database for counterfactual analysis both at the community and county level.

The evaluation has not considered the human rights based approach per se. Nevertheless, it is a research endeavour that seek answers to questions with serious implications on the fulfillment of children's rights such as: (1) is there an adequate institutional response to children's problems – solutions identified for the cases of invisible children; (2) which are the immediate, underlying and structural causes when rights are not realized – financial or human resources sustainability issues, cultural or policy contexts, etc.; (3) who are the 'invisible' children and what would be the most appropriate working definition for them – the researchers have agreed, together with the participants (social workers, supervisors and UNICEF) on a common definition for the 'invisible' children; all of the supervisors have been offered feedback in order to complete in a standard manner the forms used for data collection; (4) what makes the 'invisible' children vulnerable – the vulnerabilities have been determined by the researchers, together with the supervisors, based on lack of fulfillment of children's rights, including the child's right to education, health and 'the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'.[16]

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[16] Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The evaluation covers all key stakeholders (5 types), all counties (8) and all communities (96).

All data collection methods have involved stakeholders irrespective of their age, gender, political or religious beliefs, social or economic status. The selection of participants to the focus-groups has been based on the supervisors' recommendations. Women have been over-represented among them, due to the general distribution among social workers employed in the project (81% of all social workers from the 96 communes are women).

Children have been involved in the data collection process only in the case of community visits and case-studies. Their names have been obtained from the social worker who has been asked to select a few examples of 'invisible' children for conducting in-depth interviews with them. Their identity has not been disclosed in any of the materials produced in the evaluation. They have been interviewed by experienced researchers in their homes, in the presence of their parents/relatives. The interviews have been recorded on both paper/audiotape. They are stored in a secured place with the research company conducting the field work, CERME, which is a certified research and development unit (by the National Authority for Scientific Research) and holds a license from the National Authority for Personal Data Protection.

The evaluation methodology has several advantages, including the use of a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the fact that the quantitative data refer to the whole population (exhaustive) or representative sample (opinion survey), the utilization of a participatory approach (all key stakeholders took part in the evaluation activities), the collection of data for specific-evaluation purposes. Thus, the methodology is in line with previous research highlighting, for a meaningful use of evaluation, the importance of stakeholder involvement and of the engagement, interaction, and communication between evaluation clients and evaluators (Johnson et al., 2009).

However, there are also limitations. The main one is given by the short period of project implementation, which makes difficult estimation of impact indicators. Other drawbacks and the way in which we tackled them are presented in the following sections.

2.4.1 Community censuses

Between June and November 2011, the social workers employed in the project conducted in their commune a community census focused on vulnerable children. The questionnaires were entered in a database using a standard excel format, which included three worksheets: (1) register of individual cases (households); (2) graphs relevant for the situation of children generated at the commune level; (3) automatic report with demographic data and size of various vulnerable groups of children (school abandonment, victims of violence, neglect, children left behind by migrant parents etc.). The initial database that was provided for evaluation included only the data collected and entered up to September 15, 2011. The total number of interviewed households was over 50,000, at that moment. Nevertheless, the number of cases as well as quality of data varied greatly from one commune to another depending on the time resources, skills and interest of the social worker.

As part of the monitoring activities, each supervisor has completed regular reports on the project activities performed by social workers across their county. The structure of these reports follows the job description for social worker, as defined in the project. Thus, the supervisors' reports offer information regarding the degree of completeness, allocated time, and quality of work on the following tasks: (1) community census - data collection and data entry; (2) cooperation with other local and county stakeholders; (3) contributions to the functioning of the Consultative Commission; (4) analysis of the available information and elaboration of a need assessment; (5) conducting social assistance activities (according to art. 106, Law no. 272); (6) promoting the

organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities; (7) conducting other specific social assistance activities. This format was used for drafting the questionnaire for the opinion survey.

The supervisors' reports that were received for evaluation were coded and organized in a database. The focus-group discussion guide with social workers was elaborated heavily drawing on these data. However, they proved to be less useful for evaluation than expected because they referred only to activities completed up to September 15, 2011 and, more important, were done in different styles, including information which allowed some comparison but only within and not between counties.

In addition, neither the standard format of the census database nor the template of the supervisor's report did specify clear definitions for 'invisible' or 'vulnerable' children. Consequently, the identified cases of 'invisible' children could not be highlighted or counted. For each identified case, the specific types of vulnerabilities were not recorded, while the actions taken were known only by social workers (at the local level), being only partially and fragmentally reported to the county supervisors. A thorough system of monitoring of the identified cases was put in place only by some well organized and/or knowledgeable social workers, while the majority tended to concentrate on finalizing the census (fieldwork and database).

In conclusion, both the census database and the supervisors' reports that were initially received for evaluation offered a large quantity of unusable and/or irrelevant information. The main problems were caused by: (1) the lack of a common definition and understanding of what is an 'invisible' child; (2) the excel format used for recording the data collected through community censuses, which did not allow for the detection of the cases of 'invisible' children in each community and did not provide an automatic report showing their profile; (3) errors in the excel format referring to mistakes in formulas used for the automatic report, which created confusion among the social workers and supervisors.

For overcoming the problem of obsolete, inconsistent and incomplete data, the evaluation team elaborated a Synthetic Fiche,[17] which was applied in all 96 communes included in the project, in November 2011. The Synthetic Fiche provided updated reports about the social workers' activities until November 1st, 2011.

[17] The fiche was created taking into account the first fieldwork results, which were obtained from interviews with county stakeholders and focus groups with social workers.

Figure 4 Data about the identified 'invisible' children collected based on the Synthetic Fiche

Types of vulnerabilities
1. Children in households with many children, in poverty and precarious housing conditions
2. Children left behind by migrant parents, living in poverty or other difficult situations
3. Children at risk of neglect or abuse
4. Children with suspicion of severe diseases
5. Relinquished or at risk of child relinquishment
6. Children out-of-school and children at risk of school dropout
7. Teenage mothers who left school and/or are at risk of relinquishing the new-born child
8. Children without ID papers or documents
9. Other cases of vulnerable children

Type of actions/solutions
a. Identified case for which nothing has been done yet.
b. Identified case for which solutions have been initiated (case not being yet resolved).
c. Identified and resolved case (e.g.: child has ID papers, attends school, has disability certificates/ documents for receiving benefits, etc.).
d. Identified case, attempts of solutions have been enacted (even before project implementation), but the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'.
e. Identified case, for which the local actors consider 'there is nothing that can be done'.

This Fiche includes a nominal list of the identified 'invisible' children per commune. **By definition, an identified 'invisible' child is a child that faces one or more types of vulnerabilities (listed in figure 4) and is reached by the social worker through fieldwork activity** (in our case, through the community census). We include among the newly identified cases those children who have been already known at the local level as being in a vulnerable situation but about which the field visit offer new insights (such as abuse, neglect, etc.), irrespective if his/her family have received some social benefits or services before the start of the project (e.g. social aid, heating allowance etc.). In the Synthetic Fiche, for each newly identified case, the social workers record the specific vulnerability profile as well as the taken actions and identified solutions, according to the categories shown in the figure 4.

In addition, the Synthetic Fiche registered information about the degree of completion of community censuses (data collection and data entry) and the Consultative Commission structures. The results are presented in Annex 7.1.

Lesson learned: Synthetic Fiche represents a useful and easy to use instrument for continual monitoring of individual cases of vulnerable children identified in this project, by all interested stakeholders, in the next stages of project implementation.

2.4.2 Interviews with county stakeholders

Structured interviews were conducted with all county key stakeholders based on the guides presented in Annex 7.2. Thus, the project supervisors, DGASPC directors, and Prefecture representatives (under-prefects or directors) from all eight counties provided their view on topics related to: (1) project implementation (main strengths, main implementation problems, assessment of project relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in the county, communities ranked bellow or above the county average; number of the newly identified cases of vulnerable children, what happened after identification and what solutions have been found), (2) issues related to the cooperation between county and local authorities and (3) the changes needed to be done in the next year for increasing the project impact.

2.4.3 Focus-groups with social workers

Four focus-groups with (31) social workers employed in the project were organized in November 2011.

Table 4 Location and number of participants at the focus-groups discussions with social workers

	Number of participants, social workers employed in the project	Number of participants per county
Bacău	8	4 Bacău and 4 Neamţ
Botoşani	9	7 Botoşani and 2 Suceava
Vaslui	8	5 Vaslui and 3 Iaşi
Vrancea	6	5 Vrancea and 1 Buzău

The focus-group guide is shown in Annex 7.3. The guide is based on the structure and data provided by the supervisors' monitoring reports. Starting from the main results derived from the supervisors' reports and aggregated at the county level, the participants were asked to comment on each activity and to detail how it was carried out in their community, which problems did they have to face, what were the main outputs, and what they envisage to be done for the next period of project implementation.

2.4.4 Community case studies

Between October 31 – November 11, 2011 the two case-studies and of the two community-visits were carried out (see Annex 7.4).

The locations of the case studies were selected considering geographical and case-diversity criteria. Thus, they were carried out in diverse counties and the selected communes have had different profiles:[18] Vorona is an underdeveloped commune with many cases of vulnerable children reported before the project started; Români is also underdeveloped but with no reported cases prior to the start of the project; Calvini and Jariştea are developed communes, but while Calvini (which includes a large Roma community) has had a large number of vulnerable children even before the project start, Jariştea (a vineyard area) has had no reported cases (although the DGASPC specialists pointed out a high risk of child labour).

Table 5 Location and number of interviews in the community case studies

	Commune	Method	Interviews with local stakeholders	
			Community representatives	Households with 'invisible' children
Botoşani	Vorona	Case study	7	4
Neamţ	Români	Case study	6	3
Vrancea	Jariştea	Community visit	3	3
Buzău	Calvini	Community visit	2	2

The case studies lasted 3-4 days in each commune, while the community visits covered one day. The most relevant community representatives (social workers in and out the project, mayoralty, school, police, church, other CCS members) participated by giving information about how the
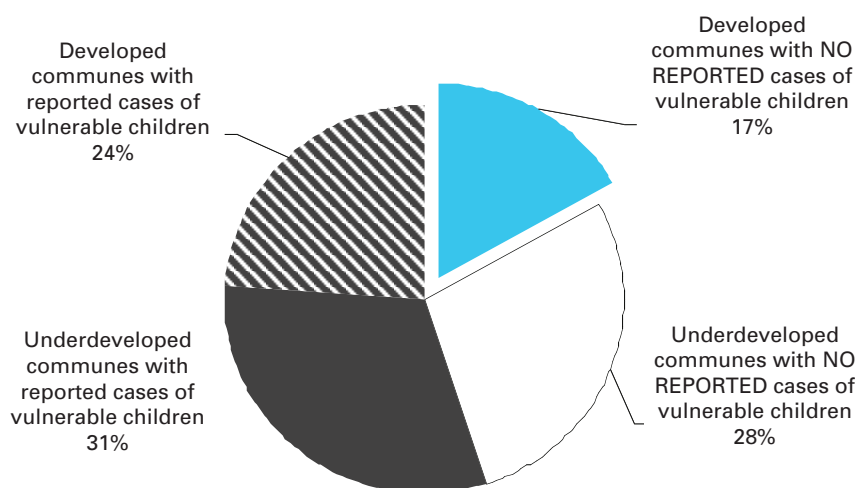
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[18] For more details see the community typology in table 6.

project was implemented in their commune, the level of knowledge regarding the project activities both of the population and decision-makers, opinions about the relevance of the project to the community needs, the newly identified 'invisible' children and their profile, actions taken and plans for intervention at the local level, the degree of involvement and role played by each local actor, collaboration between local actors, and relations with the county actors. In addition, households with 'invisible' children identified during the project took part in in-depth interviews and put in the picture their own views on what has happened and the impact of the project on their own lives.

2.4.5 Opinion survey of community representatives

The survey was conducted in the period of October 28 – November 7, 2011, by specialized field interviewers of the Romanian Centre for Economic Modeling. Data collection method: face-to-face interviews based on questionnaire. Volume: 167 community representatives selected from 41 communes. Sampling: random, stratified two-stage. Communes were selected in the first stage and community representatives in the second stage. The resulted sample is representative across types of communes and stakeholders.

Figure 5 Distribution of communes by community type (N=96)

Developed communes with NO REPORTED cases of vulnerable children 17%

Developed communes with reported cases of vulnerable children 24%

Underdeveloped communes with reported cases of vulnerable children 31%

Underdeveloped communes with NO REPORTED cases of vulnerable children 28%

Selection of communes was done randomly within the strata defined by county and community type (8 x 4 = 32 theoretical strata). Community type was determined considering the level of development and the number of reported cases of vulnerable children in need of protection as shown in table 6.

Table 6 Community typology used for the selection of communes included in the project

Criteria	Data source
1. Community Development Level	Database created for the selection of communes.[19]
2. Number of reported cases of vulnerable children	**Reported cases at the start of the project:** Database with administrative data provided by DGASPC, ISJ and DSP, for all communes located in the eight counties, covering the period 2010-2011 (March), which was used for selecting the communes included in the project.[20]
	Reported cases at September 15, 2011: Database of Community Census carried out by social workers, within the project, for all 96 included communes.

Table 7 Distribution of communes by county and community type (number)

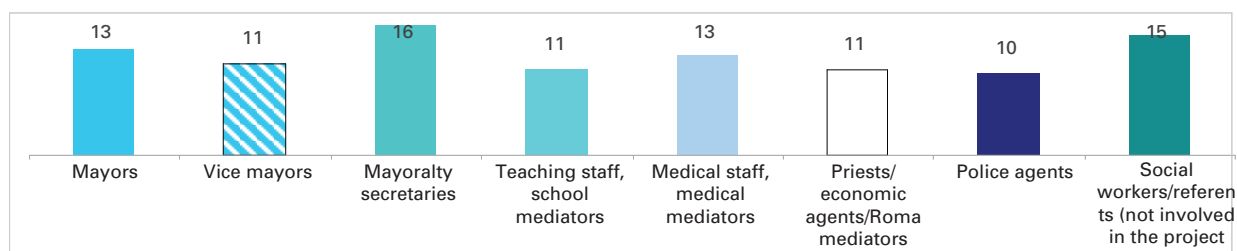|	Communes with reported cases of vulnerable children		Communes with NO REPORTED cases of vulnerable children		Total
	Underdeveloped	Developed	Underdeveloped	Developed	
ALL of which:	**30**	**23**	**27**	**16**	**96**
Bacău	3	0	5	5	13
Botoşani	9	4	0	0	13
Buzău	1	2	4	4	11
Iaşi	3	4	2	2	11
Neamţ	3	2	5	1	11
Suceava	2	4	4	1	11
Vaslui	7	0	6	0	13
Vrancea	2	7	1	3	13
SAMPLE of which:	**13**	**10**	**11**	**7**	**41**
Bacău	1	0	2	2	5
Botoşani	3	2	0	0	5
Buzău	1	0	2	2	5
Iaşi	2	2	1	1	6
Neamţ	1	1	1	1	4
Suceava	1	2	2	1	6
Vaslui	3	0	3	0	6
Vrancea	1	3	0	0	4

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. Note: Cases of vulnerable children reported until September 15, 2011.

Within each chosen commune, 4 community representatives were selected out of the following eight categories of relevant local stakeholders: (1) mayors; (2) vice-mayors; (3) mayoralty secretaries; (4) teaching staff, school mediators; (5) doctors, nurses, sanitary mediators; (6) priests, business owners, Roma mediators; (7) policemen; (8) social workers not employed in the project. At the county level, the field operators were instructed to have a balanced distribution of questionnaires across all categories of stakeholders. However, no quota was provided per county. Overall, 167 community representatives responded in the opinion survey.

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[19] Detailed methodology for the selection of communities is provided in Annex 7.6.
[20] DGASPC – General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection; ISJ – County Inspectorate for Education; DSP – Directorate of Public Health. See also Annex 7.6.

Figure 6 Distribution of respondents in the opinion survey by category of local stakeholders

Mayors	Vice mayors	Mayoralty secretaries	Teaching staff, school mediators	Medical staff, medical mediators	Priests/ economic agents/Roma mediators	Police agents	Social workers/referents (not involved in the project
13	11	16	11	13	11	10	15

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The questionnaire has covered topics related to the level of knowledge about the project, initial state of children in the community, project implementation within the community, collaboration between the local and county stakeholders, and project outcomes - perceived and expected – at the community level. Annex 7.5 presents the questionnaire with results and a descriptive analysis.

The fieldwork

3 Evaluation Findings

The key findings of the evaluation are presented grouped around the evaluation criteria. Each subchapter presents the specific research questions. For each research question, the degree of achievement is assessed by evaluators by considering all sources of information and based on a color code: green indicates a high degree of achievement, the yellow shows an average degree, and red warns of a low degree asking for corrections or a more active approach. For each research question specific evidence is detailed, differentiated across key stakeholders.

3.1 Relevance

Research questions:

- To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?

- Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives?

- Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended intermediate outcome indicators?

- Is the work of social workers adapted to local needs, as perceived by the local stakeholders?

Achievement degree: ■ High   ■ Average   ■ Low

**The project is considered highly relevant by all types of stakeholders.**

Nearly all (96.4%)[21] community representatives declare that there is a high need of social assistance services in their community. The social phenomena with the highest impact on the situation of children at community level are the lack of jobs for parents (88%), the high poverty level of population (73.7%) and the high number of children left behind by migrant parents working abroad (65.3%). In this context, 86%[22] of community representatives consider the project as being highly relevant for the commune needs (figure 7). Only in Iași and Botoșani counties, larger proportions (33%, respectively 20%) of respondents believe that more revenues to the budgets would be more efficient than enhancing the institutional capacity of delivering preventive social services at local level.

The Prefecture representatives consider that the project relevance is undisputable, as it attempts to identify and resolve cases of vulnerable children through capacity building at the local level. The relevance is also demonstrated, in their opinion, by the high interest of the local authorities to participate in this project.

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[21] Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.
[22] 11% believe that the project addresses only in 'a small' or 'very small' extent the commune needs. The other 3% did not answer the question.

Figure 7 Project Relevance in the view of community representatives

Do you consider that this project addresses your community needs?
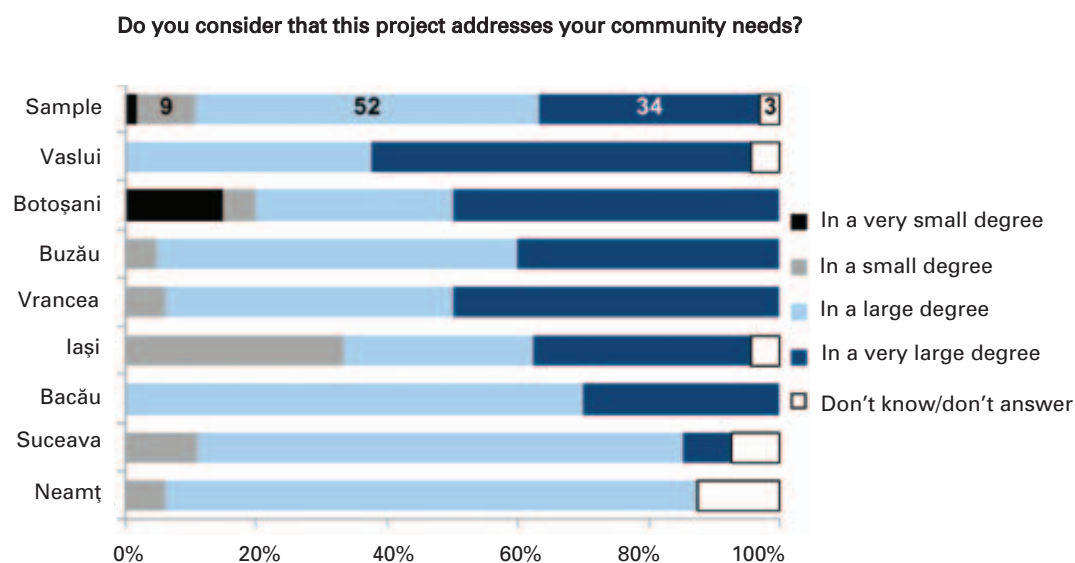
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The supervisors assess the project as highly relevant based on five grounds: (1) the work of social workers is adapted to the local needs; (2) the relation social worker-community has significantly improved, 'now everybody knows the social worker and knows whom to address in case they have a problem'; (3) 'the project teaches or reminds them to make social assistance in a professional manner, not only filling papers behind a desk'; (4) the community censuses performed by the social workers offer a clear picture on the children's (as well as elderly') vulnerabilities and, correspondingly, on the social assistance needs. The social vulnerabilities have not been previously known to this detail and accuracy by the local authorities; (5) activation of the Community Consultative Structures, although only incipient, is considered as highly relevant because 'it makes the local stakeholders responsible for identifying solutions to their community problems'.

Social workers consider that the fieldwork activity (for the community census) has been the key to the relevance of the project. Although 'very tiresome and difficult', it represented the opportunity to 'really' know their community, to discover either new cases or new vulnerabilities for 'old, well-known, cases'.

> 'I knew them from the social aid file, but there is one thing on the paper and another when you enter their home. I was not realizing that their children were living in such poor conditions.' (Social worker, Vrancea)

> 'Once we started completing the questionnaires, we could see the seriousness and the proportion of problems in the field. We could also see how many vulnerable cases we have at community level. Nobody knew exactly how many there are up to this project, we just said there are many…' (Social worker, Vaslui)

All stakeholders agree that the project objectives are still valid. Also, there is a consensus over the fact that the project activities and outputs are consistent with the intended intermediate outcomes as well as with the overall goal. More precisely, the activities completed in the first months of project contributed to building capacity at mayoralty level to identify 'invisible' children and to provide them support. The community census is seen as being the most relevant project activity during the evaluated period.

3.2   Effectiveness

Research questions

- ◼ To what extent activities carried out by social workers have attained the goal of the project?

- ◼ To what extent activities carried out by community consultative structures have attained the goal of the project?

- ◼ Is the goal expected to be reached, based on the results achieved so far?

- ◼ What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?

Achievement degree: ◼ High   ◼ Average   ◼ Low

The project is considered very effective by most stakeholders.

Prefecture representatives have a rather poor knowledge about the project activities during the evaluated period. Consequently, most of them refrain from assessing its effectiveness: 'We know nothing about what has been going on lately. Otherwise, if they had problems, they would have asked for our help. But they didn't, so it means that the project went well'.

The DGASPC directors, although do not know the exact number, typology and solutions for cases of 'invisible' children identified in the field, assess the activities of the social workers (particularly those related to fieldwork) as very effective. The role of the DGASPC directors has been rather passive, to offer a general institutional support for the work of supervisor.

Supervisors also consider as highly effective the project activities and outputs, especially those related to community censuses.

As we have shown in the previous subchapter 3.1, the project activities and outputs are consistent with the final goal defined as the attainment of an increased impact of social protection policies for the poor and socially excluded children. However, due to the **short period of implementation**, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the activities carried out by social workers and CCS have attained the goal. As a solution, we focus on the outputs and outcomes on a short-term basis. Thus, we assess the attainment of the **project intermediary objectives**, which refer to the identification at local level of (1) 'invisible' children and (2) solutions for their support.

Concerning the objective on **identification of 'invisible' children,** most stakeholders[23] agree that it has been attained. The quantitative data confirm this perception. In 4.5 months of project, the social workers employed in the project visited nearly 110,300 households and identified 3,041 cases of 'invisible' children (in 1,244 households).[24] During the evaluation period, community censuses were still going on in 14 communes (at November 15, 2011). So, by now, the number of identified 'invisible' children is, most probably, already higher.

The identified cases (3,041) account for 2.7% of all children[25] in the communes covered by the project. Bearing in mind that approximately 1.6%[26] of all children in Romania are in the protection system, it can be said that the 'invisible' children identified[27] in the project put a high pressure on the system, in case prevention solutions are not identified or effective.

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[23] Most Prefecture representatives have very poor information about the community censuses.
[24] Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. One commune from Iași county did not respond.
[25] Total population of 0-19 years old in all 96 communes, as presented in table 2.
[26] Source: General Directorate of Child Protection, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, www.copii.ro. Data for December 2009.
[27] In only 96 out of more than 2,861 communes in the country (NIS, 2010).

The identified cases include boys and girls, of all ages 0-18 years, Roma and Romanians, particularly poor, but also non-poor in difficult situations.
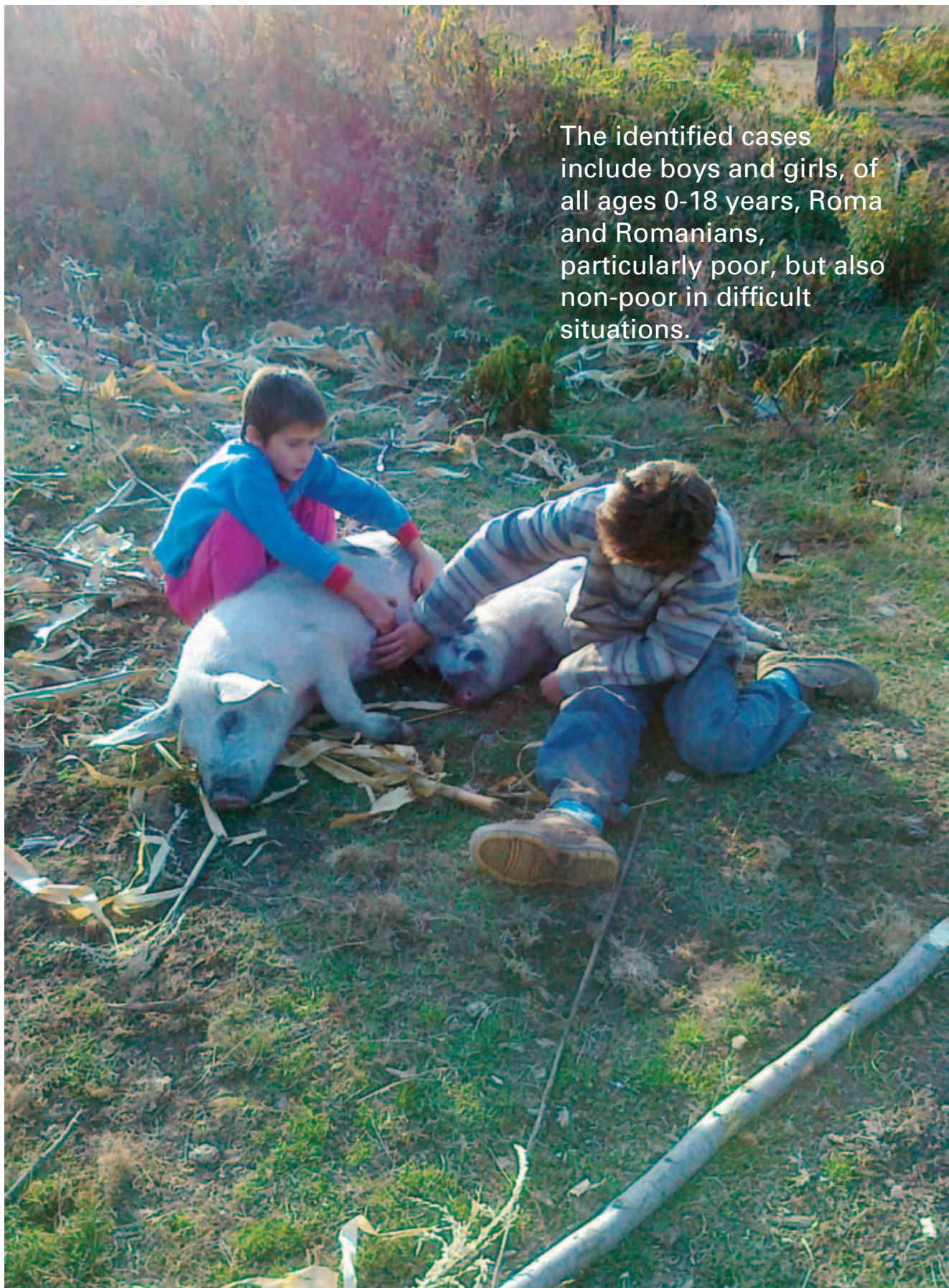
'Invisible' children were identified in all 8 counties and in 94 communes.[28] The number of cases varies greatly between communes, from 0 to 196 cases. More than a third of the identified vulnerable children come from 8 communes (with more than 100 cases each), while other 13 communes have less than 5 cases (0-4) each.

The evaluation results confirm the method used for the initial selection of communes. Cases of 'invisible' children were found both in underdeveloped and developed communes. Nonetheless, the number of cases is more than three times larger in the underdeveloped communes compared to the developed ones.

Table 8 Communes with the largest and the smallest number of identified 'invisible' children

	Commune	Community type	Number of ‚invisible' children identified
Botoşani	Ibăneşti	developed	0
Bacău	Dealu Morii	underdeveloped	1
Bacău	Găiceana	developed	1
Suceava	Izvoarele Sucevei	developed	1
Suceava	Vultureşti	underdeveloped	1
Vrancea	Rugineşti	underdeveloped	1
Vrancea	Tâmboieşti	developed	1
Botoşani	Cristineşti	underdeveloped	3
Iaşi	Vânători	developed	3
Vaslui	Rebricea	underdeveloped	3
Vrancea	Vârteşcoiu	developed	3
Iaşi	Lespezi	developed	4
Vaslui	Ghergheşti	underdeveloped	4

■ ■ ■

	Commune	Community type	Number of ‚invisible' children identified
Botoşani	Băluşeni	underdeveloped	107
Buzău	Verneşti	developed	107
Botoşani	Albeşti	underdeveloped	120
Botoşani	Todireni	underdeveloped	120
Vrancea	Slobozia Bradului	underdeveloped	121
Neamţ	Dragomireşti	underdeveloped	128
Bacău	Răchitoasa	underdeveloped	161
Vaslui	Puieşti	underdeveloped	196

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifeşti (Iași) did not respond.

Significant variation exists also across counties. The number of identified cases of vulnerable children varies between 157 (or 5% of all cases identified in the project) in Suceava and 614 (or 20% of all) in Botoşani county.[29] Thus, four times more 'invisible' children were identified in Botoşani compared to Suceava county. Correspondingly, the average 'workload' with cases of 'invisible' children per social worker range from 14 cases in Suceava county to 47 in Botoşani.[30]

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[28] One commune (Ibanesti, Botoșani county) reported zero cases and another (Trifești, Iași county) did not respond.

[29] Out of all 3,041 'invisible' children identified in the project 5% are located in communes from Suceava (157 cases), 9% in Iași (273 cases), 10% in Vrancea (288), 12% in Bacău (353), 13% in Neamț (398), 14% in Buzău (439), 17% in Vaslui (519), and 20% in Botoșani (614 cases).

[30] The average number of cases per commune (or social worker employed in the project) is 14 in Suceava, 25 in Iași, 22 in Vrancea, 27 in Bacău, 36 in Neamț, 40 in Buzău and in Vaslui, and 47 in Botoșani.

Figure 8 Number of 'invisible' children identified with the project
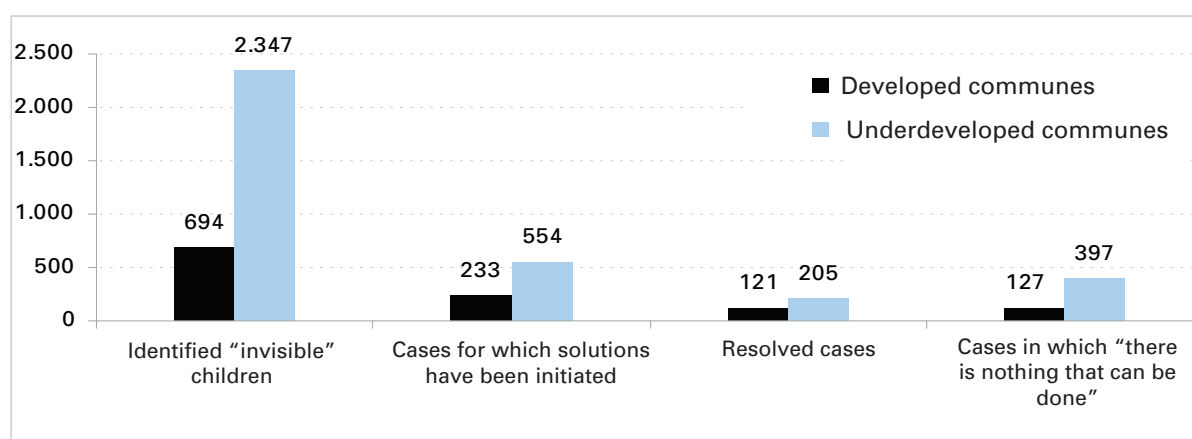
Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. Notes: Developed/ underdeveloped communes according to the initial selection of communes. Regarding the number of cases identified in the project, the commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Five other communes from Iași, Botoșani and Suceava counties did not supply information about how they managed these cases. Overall, regarding solutions for the identified cases, data are only for 2,889 cases (152 cases are missing).
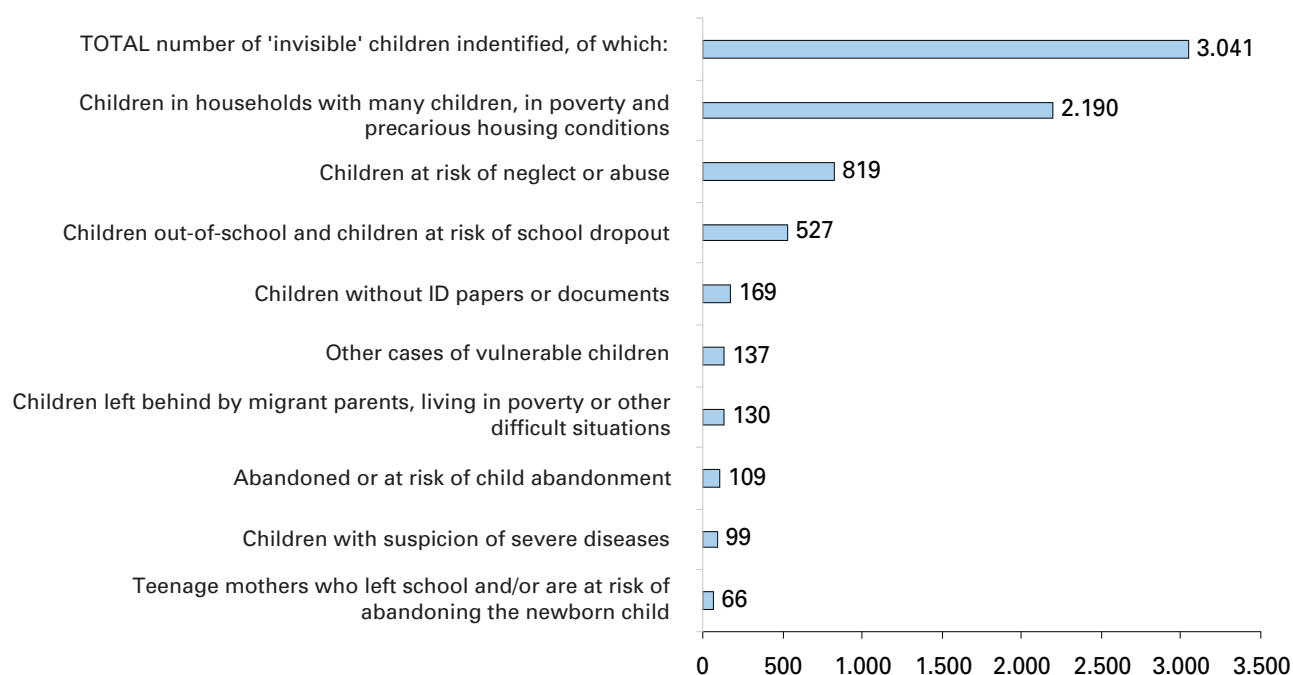
The developed communes have proved significantly higher capacity to solve the cases of vulnerable children compared to the underdeveloped communities. Figure 8 shows that the proportion of resolved cases accounts for almost 20% of total cases in developed communes, and for only 9% in the underdeveloped ones. In the same time, the share of cases for which solutions were initiated has represented 39% of all identified cases in the developed communes compared with 24% in the underdeveloped ones.

Three types of vulnerabilities predominate by far among the 'invisible' children (figure 9):

(1) Large families with many children living in poverty and precarious housing conditions, which affects 72% of all 'invisible' children reached with the project;

(2) Risk of abuse, neglect and violence. This risk is correlated with alcohol abuse. More than one in every four cases (27%) faces this type of vulnerability;

(3) Not enrolled in school or at risk of school dropout. This vulnerability concerns 17% of all identified cases of 'invisible' children.

All these vulnerabilities require long-term interventions and depend strongly on the level of economic development of the country and community. Correspondingly, the minimum package of basic social services should focus on monitoring these families and ensuring for children the basic needs: nutrition, clothing, shelter, and education.
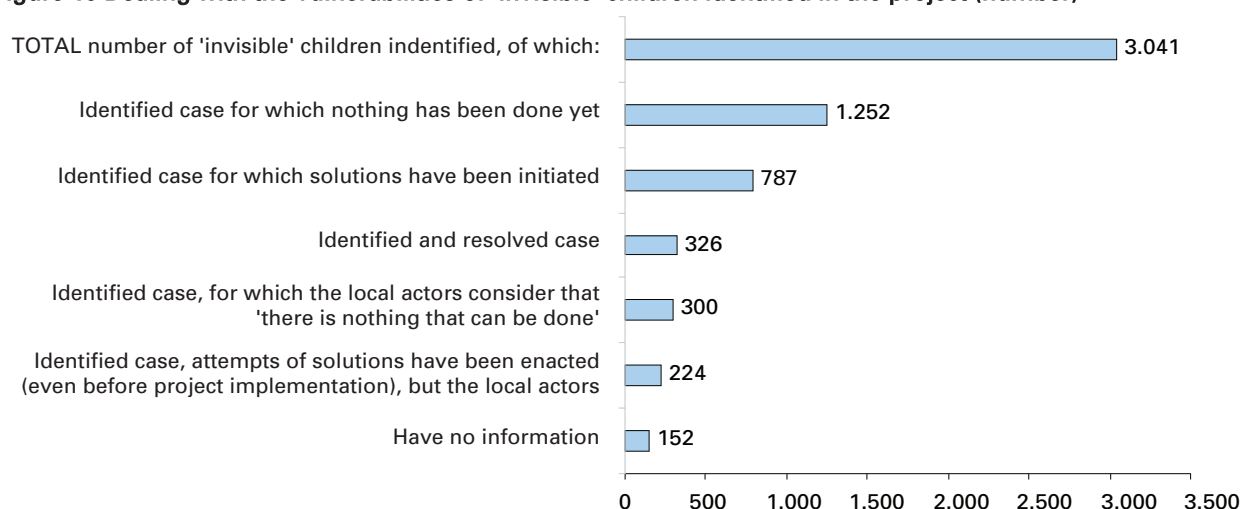
Figure 9 Number of 'invisible' children identified in the project by type of vulnerability

Type of vulnerability	Number
TOTAL number of 'invisible' children indentified, of which:	3.041
Children in households with many children, in poverty and precarious housing conditions	2.190
Children at risk of neglect or abuse	819
Children out-of-school and children at risk of school dropout	527
Children without ID papers or documents	169
Other cases of vulnerable children	137
Children left behind by migrant parents, living in poverty or other difficult situations	130
Abandoned or at risk of child abandonment	109
Children with suspicion of severe diseases	99
Teenage mothers who left school and/or are at risk of abandoning the newborn child	66

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. Notes: A vulnerable child may face more than one type of vulnerability (e.g. poor and out-of-school or poor and neglect). The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond.

On the objective on **identification of solutions for 'invisible' children**, there is still room for substantial progress. Figure 8 above demonstrates that most identified cases have been registered and acknowledged without further action being taken or solution being developed. However, in the short period of project implementation, 11% of cases were resolved (e.g. child was given ID papers, child attends school, child obtained disability certificate/ documents for receiving benefits, etc.). Thus, the project has made 'a real difference' for 326 of its direct beneficiaries, 'invisible' children and their families, but also for some other people in need. Some actions have been taken also for another 27% of cases (787 children), but in their cases many additional steps are still necessary (figure 10). Social workers and supervisors agree that there is a need for increasing effectiveness in relation to this objective, which should be the priority of the next phase of project implementation.

Figure 10 Dealing with the vulnerabilities of 'invisible' children identified in the project (number)

|	
TOTAL number of 'invisible' children indentified, of which:	3.041
Identified case for which nothing has been done yet	1.252
Identified case for which solutions have been initiated	787
Identified and resolved case	326
Identified case, for which the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'	300
Identified case, attempts of solutions have been enacted (even before project implementation), but the local actors	224
Have no information	152

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. Notes: Regarding the number of cases identified in the project, the commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Five other communes from Iași, Botoșani and Suceava counties did not supply information about how they managed these cases

While the identification of 'invisible' children rely heavily on the fieldwork carried out by the social workers, the 'resolved' cases are dependent on the knowledge and skills of the relevant stakeholders and on the collaboration between them (be it in the form of Community Consultative Structures or not).

The setting up of the Community Consultative Structures (CCSs) has been achieved in 89 communes (or 93% of all). In most communities, the CCS existed only on paper. After the project started, the CCSs were reorganized, reactivated or simply set up. As the number of identified 'invisible' children increased, CCSs have become more active and have organized more meetings as shown in figure 11.

Figure 11 Number of CCS meetings up to September 15, respectively October 15, 2011
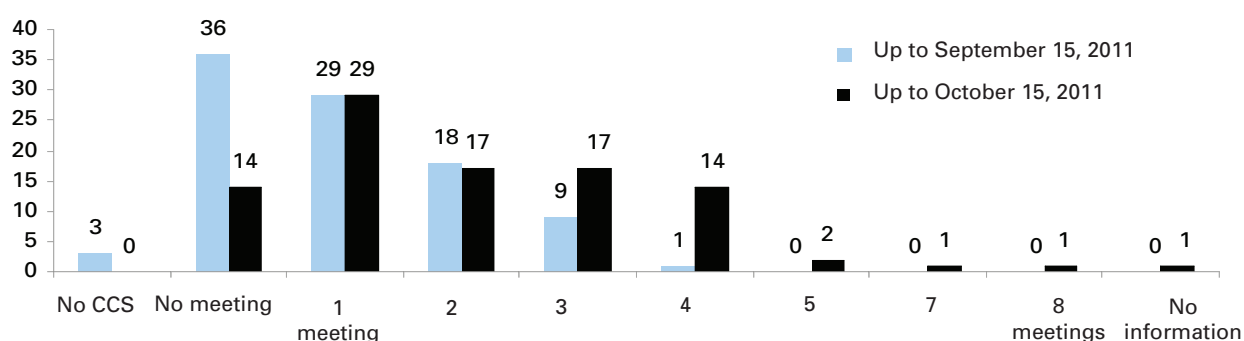

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011 and Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011 (N=96). Notes: The graph shows the number of commune by the number of CSS meetings. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond regarding the period up to October 15, 2011.

However, this does not mean that the CCSs are functional. In 14 communities the Consultative Commissions are still in the formation process.[31] In 12 communes there are members who do not agree to participate in meetings on a voluntary basis.[32]

Overall, the project has improved community participation and collaboration between local actors, beyond the CCS. In some communes, forms of Community Consultative Structures, although with different names, have been functioning even before the project started. The idea of strong collaboration between local actors (mayoralty, social worker, doctor, policeman, didactic staff, etc.) has already proven very relevant in order to develop prevention side of child protection system. As result, in their cases, the vulnerability analysis shows a lower incidence rate of 'invisible' children.

Figure 12 Collaboration between local stakeholders according to community representatives (%)
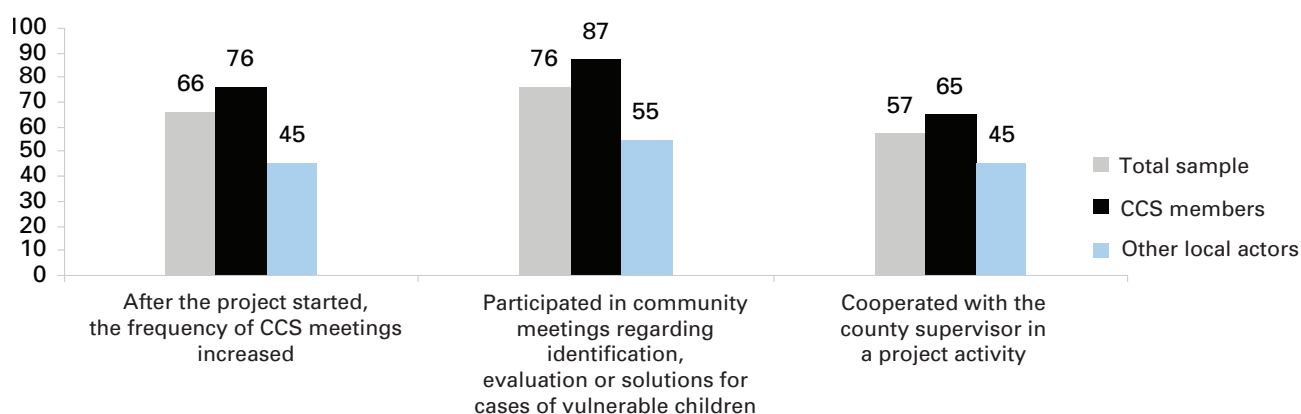
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167 total, of which 102 CCS members and 60 other community representatives (5 persons did not respond). Percentages of valid cases (see also Annex 7.5).

In order to avoid problems related to the functioning of CCS, some social workers try to resolve cases by meeting individually with the relevant stakeholders. Although this strategy has shown time efficient, on the longer term, it might not be the most effective or sustainable and it does not substantially foster awareness and ownership at community level across all stakeholders.

> 'It is hard to bring together the whole Community Consultative Structure. I have told you, people do not feel motivated. It is better to take the child by the hand and go with her to the mayor than put all that effort in organize a CCS meeting. And because everybody listens to the mayor, the case is resolved. And yes, the mayor is the key player'. (Social worker, Bacău)

Out of all local stakeholders, the social workers employed in the project have mostly cooperated with didactic, health and police staff, besides the mayors.

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[31] Four communes from Bacău, 2 from Iași, 3 from Neamț, 4 from Suceava, and one from Vrancea.
[32] Three communes from Bacău, 2 from Botoșani, 1 from Iași, 2 from Neamț, 1 from Vaslui, and 3 from Vrancea.

Figure 13 Partners of the social workers in dealing with 'invisible' children
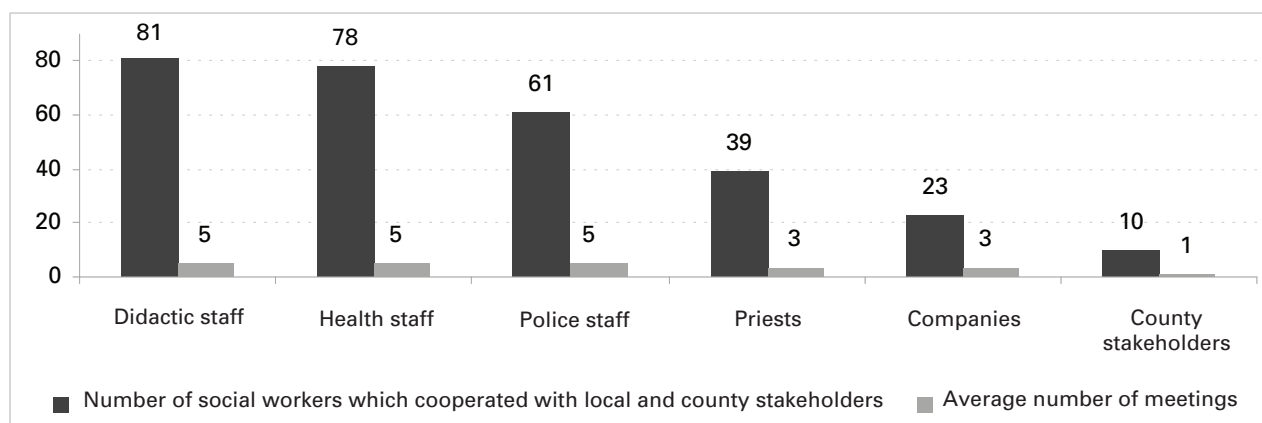
Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011 (N=96).

Functioning of the Community Consultative Structures is highly dependant on the human resources available at the local level. **Lack of knowledge and expertise at the local level** adversely affects achievement of objectives, especially in relation to putting into practice the solutions identified for the 'invisible' children. In most communities there is a lack of specialized personnel into schools (e.g. psychologist) and health services (e.g. specialized doctors for rehabilitation of children with disabilities). In addition, most local authorities have poor knowledge about how to tackle the cases of vulnerable children.

The collaboration between local authorities already works in few communities – these cases can work as examples of good practices for the rest of communes. There is not a standard recipe for activation of the Consultative Commissions. Most of them are not fully functional, even though in most communities the project social workers have put a lot of efforts in organizing meetings. In the focus-group discussions, exchange of ideas and practices has been facilitated between social workers from different communities and counties. Some social workers from communities with 'dysfunctional' CCS expressed their concerns that 'there may be something else that we don't know or we are not making right'. Being confronted with cases of communities with 'functional' CCSs, they concluded that 'we might try once again, maybe by fixing the meeting later in the afternoon, maybe immediately after the Local Council meeting, maybe offering cakes.. If others have succeeded, we may too'.

In conclusion, exchange of good practices – not as a general document or a collection of best practices, but as a practical documentation visit, most effective between communities from different counties and not within the county – represents a good way to improve the functioning of the Community Consultative Structures. Another solution would be the dissemination of project results at the county level, in the form of a large meeting, facilitated by the Prefecture. At this meeting representatives of the Community Consultative Structures (both active and inactive) as well as representatives from the corresponding deconcentrated institutions (Health Directorate, School Inspectorate) should be included among participants.

Overall, the project has improved the collaboration between the community and county representatives. In some counties, such as Buzău, strengthening of the relation between DGASPC (county) and the included mayoralties (local) is considered to be a major positive result of the project. This effect was not mentioned in the counties (such as Vrancea) in which DGASPC proposed for selection only communes with which the relation with mayoralty has been 'very good' even before the project.

Other major factors that influence the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives relate to the community conditions and culture. These are discussed below.

The **low level of awareness of social problems** in some communities has influenced all project phases, starting from the support given to social worker to the number of CCS meetings or the identification of appropriate solutions for vulnerable children.

> '(*The children from poor families*)… there (at school), of course that they are regarded so… you know how. Neither the teachers, nor their colleagues treat them right. They are marginalized.' (Social worker, Botoșani)

> 'A child that has previously been in a boarding school, I understand him, he learned there how to defend himself… And now we are trying to reintegrate him in the family. But in the school, the director told him if you don't behave well, you are not welcome here. This attitude is not quite proper if you are trying to integrate a child. All I can do is to go and tell the mayor, who goes and discusses…. They are passing the children from one to another like the balls. And in school the teachers are running away from repeating children. Nobody wants these children in their classroom'. (Social worker, Botoșani)

Widespread poverty affects large part of the communities included in the project. The low level of economic development at the national and community level makes difficult the identification of sustainable solutions for vulnerabilities related to poverty.

> '– And what do you do? Why didn't you go to the high school? – Didn't have the money... – Did you hear of school grants for the high school? Do you want to work, what do you want to do? – I want, but I don't have where. In our village, we worked by the day, but not much, because everybody is out and I need to take care of the little ones.' (Beneficiary, Neamț)

Tolerant attitudes towards problems affecting 'invisible' children together with the low level of community participation influence the achievement of the project goal on the long term. These attitudes produce distorting effects on the process of identification of 'invisible' children and, more generally, on the way in which vulnerable children are treated. Cases associated with alcohol abuse, forms of violence and poverty are sometimes considered as 'minor cases' because 'here everybody is poor, everybody drinks and every man beats from time to time his wife or children.'

'Let me tell you this, in most villages everyone knows when a neighbor beats, abuses or neglects the children in a regular manner. However, as poverty is the rule, alcohol consumption is widespread and violence is 'normal' or an acceptable educational method, no one takes action. They say: we with our family, they with theirs. However, if and when they have a quarrel, such as for a broken fence, then they immediately remember that at the mayoralty is a social worker to whom they can file a complaint. Or even better, they use the Child Telephone and report directly to DGASPC the neighbor's 'bad' behavior. So, we need more broken fences for reaching the 'invisible' children'. (Supervisor, Buzău)

Furthermore, some poor families with children (even with many children) are not eligible for any cash benefit or social service provided with the protection system. Other poor families do not apply to any kind of protection considering that 'is not worthy', 'is too expensive' or being afraid that 'child protection (DGASPC) would take my baby away'. Noteworthy, in many communes, people live with fear that 'the child protection may take my child' and for this reason they tend to avoid authorities, especially the poor. So, they do not ask for help, don't take the child to a doctor, etc.

> 'I thought that as of next year I don't want to let the eldest one to go to school. They ask a lot of things, many things they want. – In what grade is she now? – In the fifth. – Well, how so, you don't want to let her go to school? – Well, if it is hard? You need money; you need books and notebooks... She asked me now to buy her books. – Did you file a request for funds for school books? – No, because they said that if we have more than 20 acres of land they don't give us… And the horse, and the cart. And I said that all the money it takes to make that file, those papers, I better give that money to buy notebooks.' (Mother of a beneficiary, Neamț)

> '– Don't you fit in for the social assistance? – Didn't apply. It is not worthy. It is of no benefit. Instead of going to work for the mayoralty all those hours, I better go and work by the day for the people, and they also give me something extra, a potato, beans, so I have something to eat. Otherwise I take the money from them… 70 thousands a kilo of oil. Doesn't last one week… and you have to make documents. You go to Piatra, go to Roman. I hardly left the village, so I don't think I can manage, so that...' (Mother of a beneficiary, Neamț)

In conclusion, most stakeholders agree that the project is very effective. In the short period under evaluation, the activities carried out by social workers and the other local stakeholders have attained the intermediary objectives. The identification of 'invisible' children was achieved to a high degree. A total of 3,041 cases of vulnerable children were reached through the activity of community census. Furthermore, a salutary 11% of cases have already been resolved by collaboration between local stakeholders. Nevertheless, substantial progress is still needed for achieving the objective on identification of solutions for 'invisible' children.

Significant steps have already been taken. As a result of the project activities, community participation, collaboration between local stakeholders as well as that between local and county actors has improved. Community Consultative Structures were set up and have become increasingly active. Yet, both community participation and functioning of CCS need to be enhanced. The achievement of the final goal of the project strongly depends on how will be tackled the lack or poor expertise at the local level, the low level of awareness and knowledge on social problems, the generalized tolerant attitudes towards alcohol abuse, violence or school dropout of both population and officials, as well as the widespread poverty.

3.3 Efficiency

Research questions:

- ■ Were activities cost-efficient?
- ■ Have been activities done in a timely manner?

Achievement degree: ■ High ■ Average ■ Low

All stakeholders agree that the project is very efficient. In their understanding, efficiency refers to the fact that under conditions of severe budgetary constraints and in the general context of shrinkage of the social sector, the project is 'like a breath of fresh air, dealing with real problems of real people'.

In economic terms, the project is very efficient. A rough exercise shows that the total costs of the network of social assistants and supervisors for 5 months, with a monthly wage of approximately 200 USD/ person results in about 104,000 USD. The project activities led to 3,041 identified cases of 'invisible' children, which means an average cost per identified case of 34 USD. Effective actions were taken for 1,113 cases, of which 326 were resolved. Thus, limiting to the cases resolved or in process of solving, the average estimated cost per case is less than 100 USD. By comparison, the cost for one child in a day-care centre is around 300 USD/per month,[33] which is almost three times larger than the prevention costs. This is even more relevant considering the high pressure put by the large number of identified 'invisible' children on the social protection system (see also subchapter 3.2).

A total of 3,041 'invisible' children were identified in 94 communes located in 8 counties.[34] However, in 13 communes (out of the 96), the project reached less than 5 cases of vulnerable children. The other children either do not face any vulnerability or are already covered by one or more forms of support. Therefore, in the second year of implementation, the project efficiency may be increased by eliminating these communes (see table 8) and reallocating the free budget either to some newly recruited communes or to those with many cases of 'invisible' children.

From the sociologists' point of view, particularly the community census related activity has been very efficient. The large volume of questionnaires collected and introduced in a database has been completed in an efficient manner. The quality of work is unequal. However, overall, the community databases are completed in a clean and neat manner and the work of many individual social workers covering large communities (3,000-4,000 inhabitants) has been outstanding.

The importance of community census for developing the preventive approach in the social protection system has been undoubtedly recognized across stakeholders. Even though in October 2011 the National Statistical Institute implemented the National Census, this data do not make at all the vulnerable children more 'visible'. Hence, the census conducted with this project, focusing on vulnerability situations, is the most appropriate tool for the aim of early identification and development of referral systems for 'invisible' children. Even more so given that a social worker carried out the fieldwork and in this way shifted to a much more active role within community, from paperwork to outreaching the vulnerable (children but also elderly or other disadvantaged).

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[33] http://www.mmuncii.ro/pub/imagemanager/images/file/Proiecte%20legislative/270809FundamBug_SIZ.pdf. Data for 2010.
[34] One commune (Ibănești, Botoșani county) reported zero cases and another (Trifești, Iași county) did not respond.

The completion of the community census required on the part of the social workers employed in the project much effort but also time. Correspondingly, they allocated for this activity 61% of their working time compared to 35% as provisioned in the job description (figure 14). Actually, in the period under evaluation, the social workers spent more time than expected in tasks related either to fieldwork or to fostering community participation (activity 2 - cooperation with other local and county stakeholders and activity 3 - contributions to the functioning of the CCS).

> 'Data collection took us a lot of time because there are houses with large distances in between, and there is time for applying the questionnaires, then there is the time for explaining to each person, it takes you 10 minutes and then other 10 minutes until you complete it …. I had a large commune and I couldn't organize those meetings with counseling or support groups and at the same time collect and entry the data. We also had to work on Saturday and Sunday, otherwise we wouldn't finish with data collection and data entry.' (Social worker, Botoșani)

> 'Now that the project has almost ended I can sincerely tell you that when we were in the training session, nobody knew it's going to be that hard, but the fieldwork activity really exceeded our expectations (…) a very hard work for us. The mayors didn't believe either. I started to cry in the third day. People are reluctant sometimes (…) at every ten houses there was someone asking – but do you give us some money?' (Social worker, Neamţ)

Figure 14 Provisioned and effective time allocated by social workers per activity (% working time)
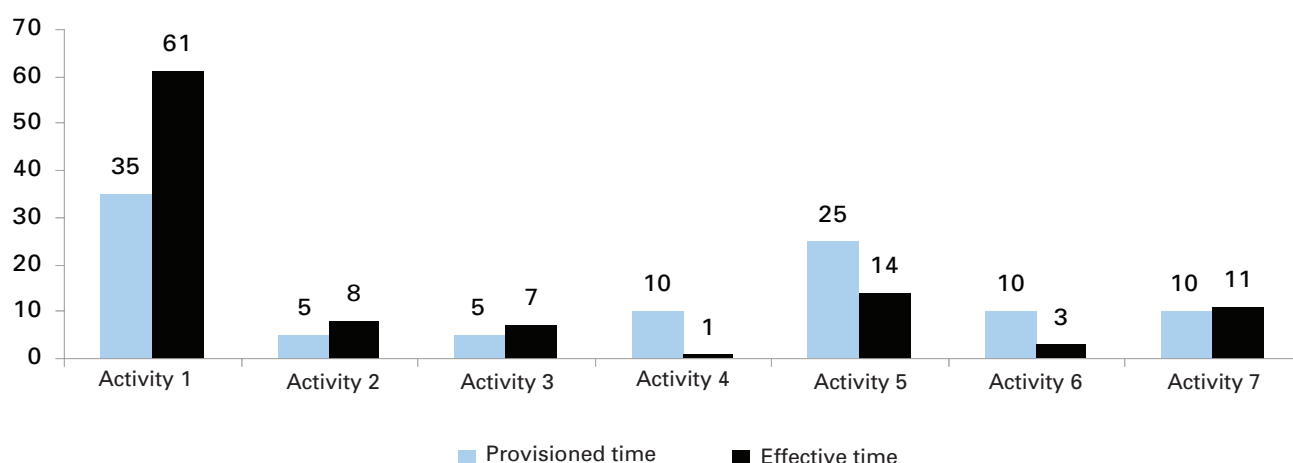
Legend:

Activity 1   Community Census - data collection and data entry

Activity 2   Cooperation with other local and county stakeholders

Activity 3   Contributions to the functioning of the Community Consultative Structure

Activity 4   Analysis of the available information and elaboration of analysis reports

Activity 5   Conducting social assistance activities (according to art. 106, Law no. 272)

Activity 6   Promoting the organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities

Activity 7   Conducting other specific social assistance activities

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011. Data were confirmed within the focus groups with social workers held in November 2011. Notes: Values for provisioned time sum up to 100%. Effective time sum up to more than 100% because some supervisors registered the same time to more than one activity, if applicable. For instance, if a social worker went in the fieldwork accompanied by a policeman, that time has been registered both to activity 1 (community census – data collection and data entry) and to activity 2 (cooperation with other local and county stakeholders).

As a consequence, other activities received less attention than provisioned in the project (figure 14). Activities lagging behind refer to: the analysis of available information and elaboration of analysis reports (activity 4 - 1% effective time compared to 10% provisioned time); promoting the organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities (activity 6 - 3% compared to 10%); and conducting social assistance activities, according to art. 106, Law no. 272 (activity 5 - 14% effective compared to 25% provisioned).

Community census was done in a timely manner in most communes (table 9). The activity was not completed in time (November 15) in 14 communes, mostly very large.[35] In addition, while in Bacău, Botoșani and Vaslui all communes finalized data collection by November 1st, Suceava and Buzău lagged behind with the lowest average rates of completion of 79% and 84% respectively.

Table 9 Community census activity up to November 1, 2011

Tasks	Number	Rate of completion (% of households in commune)
Applied questionnaires	110,347	94
Questionnaires entered the database	81,587	75

Data: Synthetic Fiche. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond.

Not all activities have been done in a timely manner. The high density of activities in a short period of implementation leaded to setbacks. Some delays were registered in the data entry activity, which were caused by the way in which social workers understood their work as a strict sequence of activities: data entry only after all data are collected, data analysis only after all data are entered and so on: 'those social workers that were late with data entry, understood that they first have to collect all data and only then introduce them' (Social worker, Vaslui); 'we will start the analysis report only after all data are introduced in the database' (Social worker, Botoșani).

Other delays were recorded with respect to: (activity 4) analysis of the available information and elaboration of analysis reports and (activity 6) promoting the organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities. The causes of these delays include: (1) data analysis and community report has been conditioned by the data collection process; (2) the excel database (for community census) contains errors in the automatic report that is computed as synthesis of results; (3) the automatic report does not accurately reflect relevant performance indicators such as number and type of the 'invisible' children identified in the project; (4) the format of the community report follows the automatic report and, consequently, does not reflect properly the progress towards achievement of project objectives and goal; (5) poor knowledge of social workers on topics such as data analysis, draft a community report, promote or organize support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities.

'We are afraid of this (*community*) report, we don't know how to do it, we will surely call [the supervisor] for help'. (Social worker, Buzău)

'We have first to learn how to do it. Now I look at the database as a turkey looks at woods.' (Social worker, Bacău)

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[35] Five communes from Buzău, 4 in Iași, 2 in Neamț, 2 in Vrancea, and 1 in Suceava.

'Sincerely, I do not know the meaning of session of parental education, let alone to organize it.' (Social worker, Vrancea)

Of all project activities, the community census conducted by social workers has proved to be, from the point of view of evaluation, the key project activity. It has created a real opportunity for identification of 'invisible' children and for improving the relation between community and the social worker. It has also put the basis for developing effective practices for prevention services at local level. Even more, the activity was highly efficient and was done in timely manner in most communities.

Due to the large variety of communities in which the fieldwork activity has been carried out, it is difficult to identify standard elements or costs useful for the definition of a **minimum package of basic social services**. In some communes, the social worker went in the field accompanied by the Roma mediator, in some by the health mediator, in some by a policeman, in some by the second social worker, while in others went alone. In some cases the social worker used a car from the mayoralty, in some from the Police, in some went by cart or by foot.

'Have you had any problems with the questionnaires in the villages with the Roma communities? – In my first field day, I have been alone and I had some problems. The second day I went to the mayor and he gave me a community mediator to go with me in the field. As long as I was with the mediator, all doors were open. (…) It is important to go with someone from the community, they act differently, more people answer to your questions. (…) Some days we went by car, other by foot depending on the car availability. So, I simply cannot estimate costs. I received my salary from the project, the community mediator received his from the mayoralty, the car was for free.' (Social worker, Vrancea)

'I went in the field together with a policeman. It's an isolated village, you have to walk 12 km through a forest, when it's raining only on foot or with a cart, it's mud everywhere. But there were no problems in answering the questionnaires, although everybody is asking what do you have for us, when are we going to receive it, some even went to the mayoralty.' (Social worker, Bacău)

The only element that allows for comparisons is the time share allocated for the various activities (figure 14). The concrete elements which can help quantifying the day-by-day activities of the social worker can follow the structure of activities shown in the current job description. However, the time share for fieldwork activities should be diminished, while that for monitoring and counseling services for the vulnerable must be increased. Although diminished, the practice of 'going in the field' should be preserved in the next phases of the project.

3.4   Impact

Research questions:

- ■ How many people have been affected?: i) number of assessed cases? ii) cases for whom the access to services was facilitated and ensured?

- ■ What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries (children, families, mayoralties, social workers, consultative commission, DGASPC)?

- ■ What are the measures taken by local stakeholders in relation to the identified needs?

- ■ Which is the degree of awareness among local stakeholders in relation to the needs of the community?

Achievement degree: ■ High   ■ Average   ■ Low

In the first months of implementation, the project has affected a large number of people. More than 110,300 cases were assessed in the 96 communes covered by the project. A number of 3,041 'invisible' children were identified in 1,244 households located in 94 communes.[36] Out of these, 11% of cases (326 children) were resolved, the access to services being facilitated and/or ensured. For additional 27% of cases (787 children) the solving process was also initiated at the local level. Given the allocated resources (financial, time and human) in the first 4.5 months of implementation, the current impact of the project can be considered as being high.

However, there is still a long way to go. For 43% of the identified cases no measure was taken, besides recording and acknowledging them as 'invisible' children that need support. Furthermore, **for 18% of cases the local actors think that 'there is nothing that can be done'.** The vast majority of these cases relate to poverty, which cannot be 'resolved' in a short time and/or in the absence of local economic development. This type of vulnerability is also sometimes overlooked or considered 'minor' because: 'we know about them, it's not that we don't know, but what can we do, they are poor, and so is the whole commune, there is nothing we can do'. The same happens with cases of abuse or violence, especially when they are linked to alcohol abuse of one or both parents.

The label **'there is nothing that can be done'** is related to the **perception of the local stakeholders**. However, in some communities, the project succeeded to challenge this dominant opinion. There are communities in which the SPAS social worker as well as the other local actors believed that 'there was nothing we can do' in a certain case and the social worker employed in the project refused to take the case for granted and thrived on resolving it – e.g. case of health problems needing a surgical intervention, the project social worker addressed for help to the TV channel Kanal D, raised the money, the beneficiary had the intervention, feels much better, currently the social worker is in process of monitoring the case.

At the same time, the 'resolved cases' are predominantly only partial 'solutions'. For instance, some 'invisible' cases refer to children with disabilities, who are not diagnosed because the parents are not aware, do not know what to do, or do nothing because of fear that DGASPC ('child protection') would take their child away. When such cases were identified in the project, the social worker together with other local stakeholders provided support in taking the child to a doctor and issuing the necessary official documents for receiving social benefits. Therefore, in these cases, the solutions are only partial as long as do not include also specialized rehabilitation services or constant monitoring.

Figure 15 Do you know cases of vulnerable children identified with the project in your commune? (% community representatives)
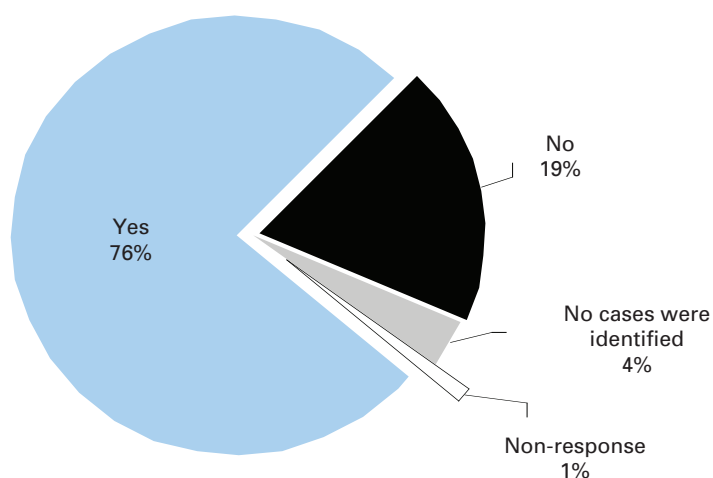
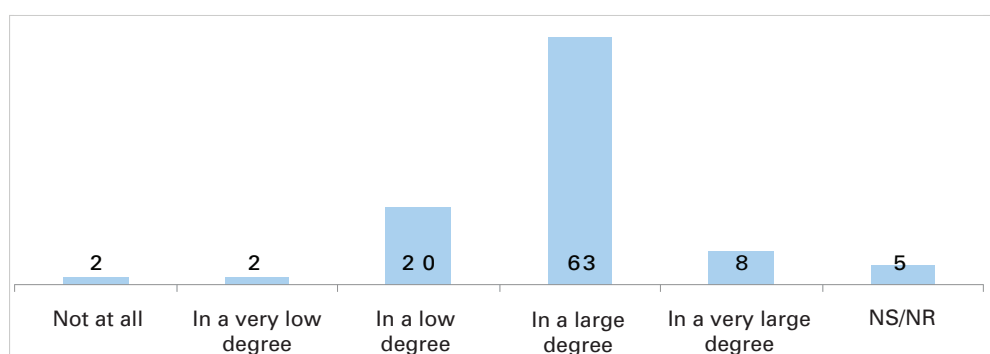Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

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[36] Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. One commune (Trifești, Iași) did not respond and one commune reported zero cases (Ibănești, Botoșani).

The large majority (76%) of community representatives know some cases of 'invisible' children identified in the project.

The local stakeholders are well informed regarding the project. 95% of the respondents to the opinion survey know that the project runs in their commune. 86% declare to know 'many' or 'very many' things about the project. In fact, 95% provide the correct name of the social worker involved in the project, 95% know who is the county supervisor and 98% demonstrate to be aware of the scope and main objectives of the project. In all communes the population was informed about the project, mostly as a result of the fieldwork. Furthermore, 43% of community representatives certify that in their communes the children were informed at school regarding the project.

Another important impact of the project is the extended effect of raising awareness regarding the issue of 'invisible' children among local stakeholders. In the communes in which consultative structures are operational, a vulnerable child has higher chances to be identified and to receive adequate support, particularly if the child accumulates multiple vulnerabilities (e.g. depression associated with mother's migration for work abroad, together with poverty, neglect or abuse by an alcoholic father). Raising awareness is also a first step in tackling the practices/ behavior of population that are harmful for children. However, given the persistent attitudes tolerant towards alcohol abuse, violence or school dropout of both population and officials, long term interventions are needed.

Figure 16 As impact of the project, do you think that in your commune … There is a change for the better of the adults' attitudes towards the children? (% community representatives)

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

For the future, the local stakeholders have high expectations from the project. The expectations of local stakeholders regarding the project are very high, mainly because UNICEF is 'serious' and 'trustworthy'. 74% believe that the situation of vulnerable children will improve (to a 'large' or 'very large' degree) as a result of the project. 73% expect the community services for prevention of child separation from the family to improve (to a 'large' or 'very large' degree) as a result of the project.

Figure 17 As impact of the project, do you think that in your commune ... The services preventing child separation from the family will improve? (% community representatives)
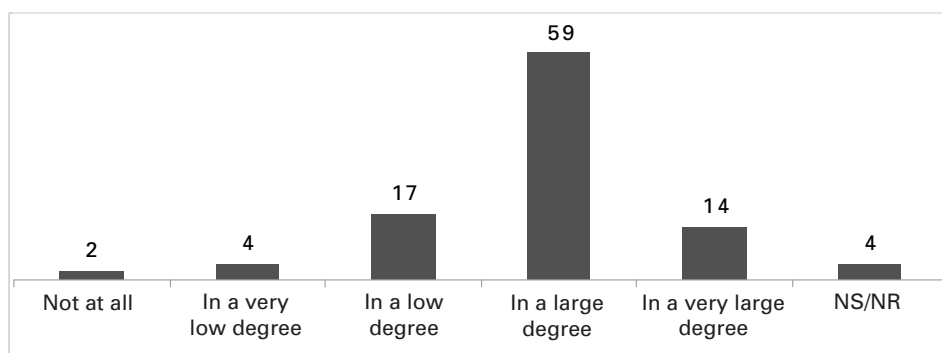
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

In the same time, the project has raised high expectations at the county level also. To keep the momentum created in the first 4.5 months is a challenge in the next period. The expectations refer to the symbolic capital associated with UNICEF, as 'there were many NGOs coming here with project, they came and did something but now, things are different, if it is UNICEF. It must be something much more serious' (Prefecture representative, Vrancea).

The project's approach, focused on identifying solutions at community level, facilitated by the Community Consultative Structures, are in line with UNICEF's recommendation that the 'key to building the protective environment is **responsibility**: All members of society can contribute to ensuring that children do not become invisible' (UNICEF, 2006, p.35). The challenge is however to mobilize 'all members of society' and to multiply the positive changes in the rest of the communities included in the project and/or to replicate them in new communities. This can be done mainly through exchange of good practices, dissemination and training activities.

3.5 Sustainability

Research questions:

■ To what extent do the benefits of the project will continue after donor funding ceases?

■ Which is the general openness of the mayoralties to integrate the current social workers in the organizational structure of mayoralties?

■ What is the likelihood that the mayoralties will integrate the current social workers in their organizational structure?

– What are the major factors which influence the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project?

Achievement degree:　　　■ High　　　■ Average　　　■ Low

Of all evaluation criteria, **sustainability is the most problematic dimension** of the project. We refer here to the sustainability of staff and budgets, while that of practices (in the form of cooperation) is addressed under the section 3.6 on *Connectedness.*

Sustainability of staff

The openness to integrate the project social workers in the mayoralty organizational structure is a theme of controversy among community representatives. At the sample level, only 48% of respondents think that the current social worker will be hired by the mayoralty, while 23% believe the contrary and 29% cannot appreciate. Opinions do not differ significantly between the local decision-makers (mayors, vice mayors, and secretary) and the other respondents, with the exception of the fact that the non-response rate is significantly lower for the decision-makers (18%) compared with the other local stakeholders (a high 36%).

The openness varies greatly across counties (figure 18). In Buzău and Vaslui counties, the opinions of the community representatives are overwhelmingly positive, precisely because most of the social workers involved in the project are already employees of mayoralties.[37] By contrast, in Neamț, Bacău and Vrancea counties, the non-responses predominate by far, situation which is associated with the fact that most communes from these counties have social workers external to the mayoralty.[38] Nevertheless, all community representatives from Neamț and Bacău who answer the question are positive that the mayoralty will find a solution to retain the social workers trained and experienced in the project. Iași representatives are also predominantly optimistic although most communes involve external social workers in the project.[39] The counties Botoșani and Suceava work only with external social workers (see table 2). Nonetheless, in Botoșani most community representatives are optimistic.

Figure 18 Following the project, do you think that in your commune … The social worker employed in the project will remain within the mayoralty with the same responsibilities? (% community representatives)
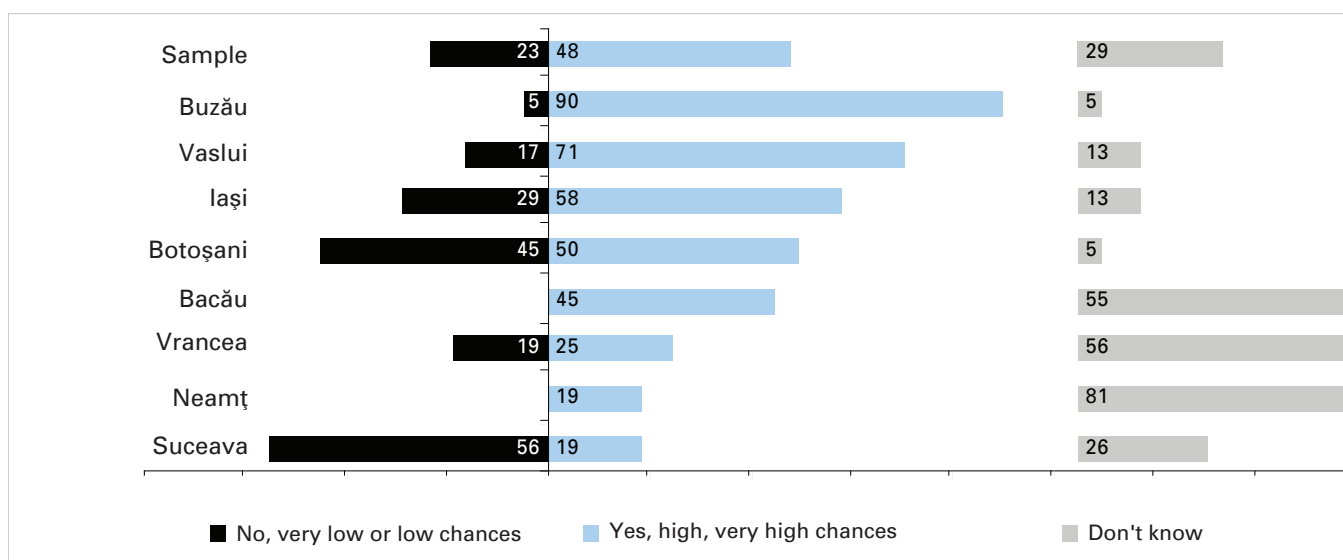
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

[37] In Buzău, 9 of the 11 social workers and in Vaslui, 9 of the 13 (see table 2).
[38] In Neamț, 8 of 11 social workers, in Vrancea 9 of 13, and in Bacău 12 of 13 (see table 2).
[39] Seven out of 11 social workers are external to the mayoralty.

Taking into consideration only the respondents from communes with external social workers involved in the project,[40] the highest openness is declared in Iași, Botoșani, Vaslui and Buzău. In Suceava, the negative opinions predominate.
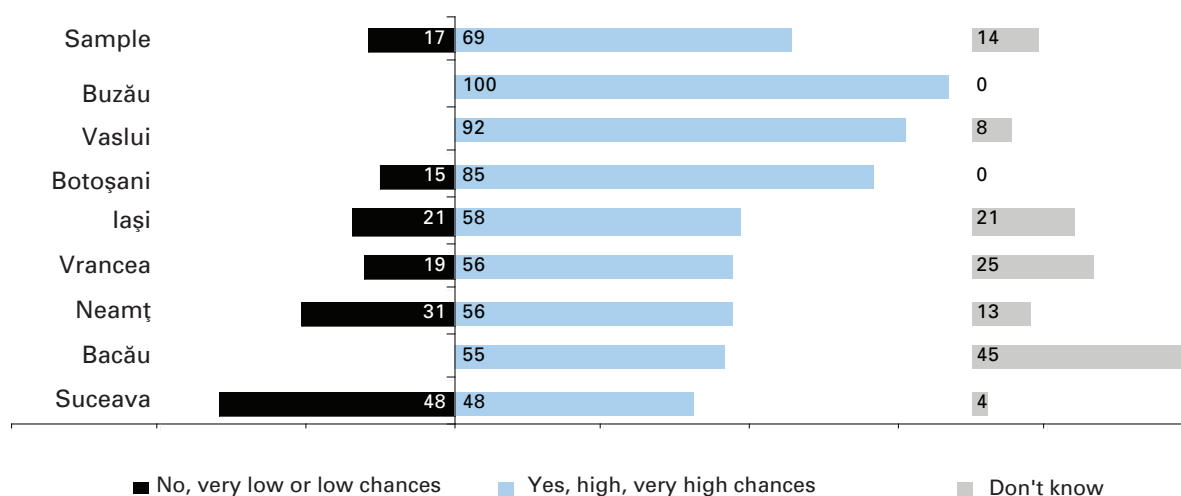
According to the county stakeholders, the likelihood of the newly recruited social workers to be included in the organizational structure of mayoralty is rather small. In their opinion, the likelihood depends on the openness of mayoralties only in a small extent. Although most mayoralties would like to keep the trained social workers, the legislative provision that imposes a blockade of posts in the public sector represents a major barrier, at least for the year 2012. The Prefecture representatives clearly explained that hiring the social worker is possible only if the mayoralty has a vacancy. When the mayoralty has one or even two employees for social assistance (such as in most communes from Vrancea), hiring more staff would not be possible. Precisely for this reason, few DGASPC directors consider that the main focus of UNICEF in the next months would be to lobby and negotiate with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection a solution to this problem that can put in danger the project sustainability.

Sustainability of budget

Most communes, particularly the poor (underdeveloped) ones, are characterized by high needs (high number of identified 'invisible' children) and low or very low local budgets. The budget is so low that most of them send in unemployment the personal assistants of people with disabilities and/or delayed the payment of a series of social benefits. Some communes can pay not even the wages of the teaching staff.

Despite the insufficient budgets, most community representatives (69%) think that the project activities will be assumed and continued at the community level after the project end (figure 19). This holds for decision-makers as well as for the other local stakeholders, for underdeveloped communes as well as for the developed ones. The potential sustainability is significantly higher for communes with project social workers already employed by mayoralty (92%) compared to those with external social workers (60%).

Figure 19 Following the project, do you think that in your commune … The project activities will be assumed and continued by the local authorities and/or the Community Consultative Structure after the project end? (% community representatives)

Commune	No, very low or low chances	Yes, high, very high chances	Don't know
Sample	17	69	14
Buzău		100	0
Vaslui		92	8
Botoșani	15	85	0
Iași	21	58	21
Vrancea	19	56	25
Neamț	31	56	13
Bacău		55	45
Suceava	48	48	4

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

[40] Subsample of 115 respondents, which is not representative. The results are only indicative given the relatively small number of cases in some counties.

The potential sustainability varies significantly between counties. Local stakeholders from Botoșani, Vaslui and, especially, Buzău seem determined to ensure sustainability of activities after the project conclusion. In the other five counties, around 50-60% of the community representatives think that the activities will be continued, while the others believe they will be stopped after the donor funding ceases.

3.6   Connectedness

Research questions:

■   What is the likelihood that the Community Consultative Structure will continue to meet and solve cases after the project end?

■   What is the likelihood that the services developed in the project will continue on long term?

Achievement degree: ■ High   ■ Average   ■ Low

Connectedness is highly correlated with sustainability and it refers to the need to ensure that activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account? The activities of the project have both a short-term emergency nature as well as a longer-term one. The differentiation is based, on the one hand, on the type of identified vulnerability (e.g. poverty or disability require long-term interventions, while ID papers and documents require only short-term interventions) and on the other hand, on the potential of scaling up project activities for developing further the prevention side of the child protection system.

In this section connectedness is discussed in relation to the survival of the local mechanisms and practices of cooperation as well as of the services developed with the project.

Similar to sustainability, the connectedness dimension needs attention.

Most Community Consultative Structures (CCS) that participate in the project are still fragile. Their functioning still needs to be enhanced. The likelihood that they will continue to be functional after the project end is highly dependent on the existence of the social worker involved in the project. The experience gained until now shows that **retaining the social worker in the mayoralty would considerably increase the chances of survival and development of the CCS.** Another factor that would contribute in a positive manner is the emphasis on dissemination activities of best practices among communities included in the project. This would provide a great opportunity, on the one hand, to officially recognize the successful work conducted in some communes and on the other hand, to increase knowledge and skills in other communes. The Prefecture representatives expressed their openness to facilitate this kind of dissemination activities at the county level.

> 'If we are leaving the mayoralty, all these meetings of the CCS will not take place any more. Where they have been already functioning before the project, I guess they will still meet. But, for instance in my case, the CCS will meet no longer for sure. Now, we are somehow pushing them to meet. We are telling them let's meet, let's do this and that, let's see how we can do it. But if there is nobody pushing them, nothing is done. It took us such a long time until the first meeting of CCS, they either left for holiday, or I don't have time today, I have other things I have to take care … And now it's a pity if we leave, they will give up and not meet anymore.' (Social worker, Botoșani)

The project promotes a type of social worker that is highly valued at the local level. A social worker who concentrates on outreaching activities and on preventive services dedicated to vulnerable people, irrespective if they are or not administratively eligible for the benefits and services available in the protection system. A social worker who 'has time for the people', 'makes visits to the people', 'talks to them', 'really cares', and 'tries to help'. A social worker that, in the collective mind, is opposed to the 'standard' social worker who 'hides behind a desk covered with tones of paper', 'never has time for people' and 'only asks how much money you have, how many this or that, and sends you out with a goodbye because you do not meet some requirements'. For preserving the existence of this type of social worker, it is vital to ensure the survival of the outreaching and preventive activities. The simplest way to do this would be to retain the project social worker in the mayoralty.

However, once hired to SPAS, there are high chances that he/she would be forced to shift to the 'standard' role of social worker focused on administrative work. Once this change takes place, the relation with the potential beneficiaries/ vulnerable people also deteriorates: 'I go now with the questionnaires in the field and I see them, how poor they live, I can see that their children are not well… and then they come to me and I have to tell them sorry, you are not eligible for the social aid. You can imagine that they don't trust me any more.' (Social worker, Vrancea)

So, simply hiring the persons involved in the project does not guaranty the development of preventive services at the local level. The most effective way to achieve this objective would be to create a post dedicated to the outreaching and preventing activities within SPAS. According to the supervisors and experienced social workers that we interviewed, an organizational structure with two[41] social workers (one 'standard' and one 'field' social worker) is the most suitable to tackle the complex social problems in a commune. In this way, the 'standard' and the 'field' social workers can cooperate and share the responsibilities of 'paperwork' and 'fieldwork'. One can focus on the administrative tasks, while the other can cover the outreaching activities, monitor the vulnerable cases, provide counseling and deliver preventive services to the needy ones.

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[41] Or more social workers, depending on the commune size and profile.

3.7 Coherence

Research questions:

■   Are the policies and practices in the fields of health, education, public order and safety and social assistance complementary or contradictory to developing the prevention side of social work?

Achievement degree: ■ High   ■ Average   ■ Low

Among the policies and practices that impede the development of prevention services at the community level are the following:

Health – Many doctors commute to a city (or to a larger commune) and have 'neither time, nor interest to take part in our community activities'. In the large communes with remote villages, going to the doctor is difficult (and/or costly) for families with children and the medical staff rarely go in the field. So, even if medical services are available in the commune, the population of remote and poor village has low access. In some communes, people complaint that 'the doctor does not know anything, besides that he/she is arrogant and indifferent'.

Education – Since financing per pupil has been introduced, the wages of teaching staff depend on the number of pupils. As a coping strategy, in many schools from the studied communes, teachers do not longer keep a clear record of absences and marks. Many social workers reported situations of 'hidden' school dropout or substantial absenteeism which is not officially registered. The situation is well known, but accepted at the local level, including by the mayoralty.

Social order and safety – The reduction of the number of community policemen in rural areas affects particularly the larger commune with many temporary migrants for work (e.g. vineyard areas).

Conclusions
Recommendations

4 Conclusions

The present study evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of the UNICEF's project on 'Helping the invisible children'. It also contributes to the understanding of its relevance and impact. The findings are intended to be used for reshaping the project in the second year of implementation and for identifying key elements for policy development in the field of prevention services for child protection.

The evaluation framework follows the OECD/DAC criteria including: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, connectedness and coherence. The evaluation is based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

The project is considered as highly relevant, effective and efficient both according to the stakeholders' opinions as well as according to the performance indicators. Both sustainability and connectedness should be of special concern in the next phase of the project.

> **Are there any 'invisible' children? Have they become 'visible' as result of the project?**

There are many 'invisible' children. In only 4.5 months of implementation, a number of 3,041 'invisible' children were identified in 1,244 households. The 'invisible' children identified[42] in the project put a high pressure on the system, in case prevention solutions are not identified or effective.

Some of them have become 'visible' as result of the project, some have already been 'in the view of government', but new vulnerabilities have been discovered due to the project activities. Thus, inherently, the cases of vulnerable children are more numerous in the project communities as compared to the out-of-project communities from the same counties. Some of them will never be found in the official statistics – as is the case for those who have not and will not benefit from any support, while others will increase the number of disability certificates or ID papers. In this latter case, the 'cazuistica' (number of vulnerable cases) in these communities is a sign of the system efficiency, and therefore, not directly comparable to the 'cazuistica' from the rest of the communities, in the same counties, which have not been included in the project.

As an example, let us consider the cases of children at risk of abuse, neglect and violence. In March 2011, each County General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection from the selected eight counties were requested to provide a series of statistical data, at locality level, for the year of 2010 (Stănculescu et al., 2011). Data on the number of registered cases of child abuse, neglect or violence were included. The total number of reported cases, for all 96 communes in the project, was of 241. The total number of children at risk of abuse, neglect or violence, in the same communes, after 4.5 months of project implementation, is of 819 cases. Of course, the two indicators are not directly comparable as the latter one focuses on the cases at risk (as the social workers found during the community census), whereas the first one registers only the cases that comply with the administrative definition of neglect, violence or abuse (as registered in the official records). This is why the monitoring system on the child's situation requires a rather dramatic change of perspective in order to prevent the cases 'at risk' to become '(administratively) reported' at the end of the year.

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[42] In only 96 out of more than 2,861 communes in the country (NIS, 2010).

Who are the 'invisible' children?

The identified cases of vulnerable children include boys and girls, of all ages 0-18 years, Roma and Romanians, particularly poor, but also non-poor in difficult situations.[43]

Three types of vulnerabilities predominate among the 'invisible' children:

(1) Large families with many children living in poverty and precarious housing conditions, which affects 72% of all 'invisible' children reached with the project;

(2) Risk of abuse, neglect and violence. This risk is correlated with alcohol abuse. More than one in every four cases (27%) faces this type of vulnerability;

(3) Not enrolled in school or at risk of school dropout. This vulnerability concerns 17% of all identified cases of 'invisible' children.

What makes them 'invisible'?

Simply said, the way the current social assistance system works. It is not about a single cause, but a complex of intermingled systemic inefficiencies which require strong interventions to be changed. Here are the most important:

- The lack of human resources of the rural SPAS. Not all rural localities in Romania have a social worker, not to mention the problems on specialization or necessary training curricula of the current employees of SPAS.

- The bureaucratic inefficiency of the social assistance related paperwork. All data concerning payment of social benefits, at local level, rely on heavy paper files, completed by the social worker. This leave very little room in their daily work program, for conducting fieldwork activity. Therefore, even though a mayoralty has a social worker, in a locality with generalized poverty and numerous beneficiaries of social assistance programs, the social worker is 'covered with papers'. The probability that in these communes there are also many cases of 'invisible' children is quite high.[44] Also, the current public discourse[45] on rationalizing public expenditures of social assistance and discovering the 'fraud' in the 'papers' put additional pressure on the social worker (in most cases in rural communities there is one social worker).[46] The chances of overloading the already much too work-loaded social worker are very high.

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[43] According to the operational definition used for this evaluation, an identified 'invisible' child is a child that faces one or more types of vulnerabilities (poverty, neglect, abuse, violence, school dropout, abandonment, etc.) and is reached by the social worker through fieldwork activity.

[44] The number of identified cases of 'invisible children' is more than three times larger in the underdeveloped communes compared to the developed ones.

[45] The Minister of Labour, Family and Social Protection, Sulfina Barbu: 'Those that fraud the system should be afraid of the reform of social assistance' (http://www.ziare.com/articole/frauda+asistenta+sociala) or fieldwork activities discovering the fraud of a 'sick system' (http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/sulfina-barbu-opozitia-este-lipsita-de-discernamant-950941.html).

[46] This is not to say that the system should not be cleaned of corruption, but as long as the data management relies on paper, the monitoring activity at the local level resumes to 'discovering the fraud' and there are no interchangeable databases between the different departments of the same Ministry, the chances for fraud reduction are very scarce.

- The lack of practice of outreaching activities for the social workers, as recognized by the internal social workers employed in the project. It is due to a series of factors, including the above-mentioned causes, and adding others, which might be identified by a further dedicated study.

- Lack of cooperation between the local stakeholders, which might also prove helpful in the identification part as long as the actors objectively report the data. This leads to the next identified cause.

- Systemic inefficiencies in education and health sectors. The high risk of school dropout[47] is often hidden by teachers or schools and it has been discovered by the social workers through the fieldwork activity. There are also family doctors who do not pay home visits for the enrolled children/families and even if they do, they do not always act in a responsible manner.[48] These can also be the subject of further in-depth investigations.

- The high level of tolerance of abuse or poverty cases makes difficult not only the solutions part, but also the identification part. The census has again proved its validity, because, otherwise, 'people report such cases only as revenge against that family'.

All of these causes have been brought to light by a single, but complex activity – community census. These issues should be addressed, in an operational manner, through the implementation of the Strategy for Child Protection.

> **Who is responsible for tackling the problems of 'invisible' children? Is the institutional response adequate? In case it is not, which are the causes?**

The policy[49] as well as the project response would be the Community Consultative Structures. However, these structures are 'only set on paper' in some project's communes, and most likely in other communes/counties too.[50] Therefore, another finding drawn from the project is that the prevention side does not function in this institutional setup, without further incentives 'to make it work'. The project activities have made these structures functional in several communities and proved that the CCS can really work efficiently to provide solutions for the vulnerable children.

In the short period of project implementation, 11% of the identified cases were resolved and for additional 27% of cases (787 children) the solving process was also initiated, which can be recorded as a high impact.[51] However, for a part of 18% of cases, the local actors tend to share the belief that 'there is nothing that can be done'. The vast majority of these cases relate to poverty, which cannot be 'resolved' in a short time and/or in the absence of local economic development. In many communities this type of vulnerability is taken for granted or considered 'minor', specifically because it is widespread. The same happens with cases of abuse or violence, especially when they are linked to alcohol abuse of one or both parents.

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[47] Similar findings in a UNICEF Romania study on the statistics on school dropout, to be published. Source: interview with the Deputy Director of the Institute for Educational Sciences, Bucharest, Romania (February 2012).
[48] E.g not issuing a disability certificate for a child of three years old with clear physical disabilities. Source: community visit, Jaristea, Vrancea county.
[49] In accordance with the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights, 2008-2013.
[50] Interviews with county supervisors confirmed that the CCSs do not function in most of the county's communes.
[51] Taking into consideration the allocated resources (financial, time and human).

> **What will happen with the 'invisible' children once in case the donors' funding ceases?**

Sustainability is the most problematic dimension of the project. In order to understand what might happen with the 'invisible' children, the questions are re-focused on what happens with the social workers employed in the project and with the functioning of the CCS. All of these are analyzed under the assumption that the UNICEF's funding for the social workers' wages ceases.

Most communes, particularly the poor ones, are characterized by high needs[52] and low local budgets. Despite the insufficient budgets, most community representatives think that the project activities will be assumed and continued at the community level after the project end. The potential sustainability is significantly higher for communes with project social workers already employed by mayoralty compared to those with external social workers.[53] Also, the likelihood that the CCSs will continue to be functional after the project end is highly dependent on the existence of the social worker trained in the project.[54]

To sum up, all stakeholders agree that the project is very efficient. A rough exercise shows that the current cost for one child in a day care centre is almost three times larger than the prevention cost as resulted from the project and the cost in the specialised protection system (for example in a residential unit) is at least 10 times higher. This is even more relevant considering the high pressure put by the large number of identified 'invisible' children on the social protection system. Under conditions of severe budgetary constraints and in the general context of shrinkage of the social sector, the project is perceived 'like a breath of fresh air, dealing with real problems of real people'.

Overall, the project was successful and should continue in the future. It already raised awareness regarding the issue of 'invisible' children, but at the same time it has raised high expectations both at the community and the county levels. The way it will continue will be surely carefully monitored by the local, county and national stakeholders.

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[52] High number of identified cases of 'invisible' children.
[53] Although most mayoralties would like to keep the trained social workers, the legal framework enacting the blockade of posts in the public sector for the next year represents a major challenge to ensuring the sustainability of project staff.
[54] The experience gained until now shows that retaining the social worker in the mayoralty would considerably increase the chances of survival and development of the CCS.

5   Recommendations

The 'easy' part of the project is finished. The 'invisible' children are no longer invisible. They are here and need solutions to their problems. Resolving as many as possible of these cases is a big challenge for the project's next phases. In order to tackle it, the evaluation supplied a number of ideas, conclusions and recommendations that could smooth the process. So, the 'hardest' part of the project is now beginning.

The following recommendations were written-up together by evaluators, UNICEF and main counterpart at central level, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection and its General Directorate for Child Protection. This tripartite approach will influence not only appropriate buy-in by stakeholders but will also help further dissemination of relevant information, mainly during the second year of project implementation in 2012. They are structured on two sections: the first one relates to project management and the second one to the policy use of findings.

- • **Recommendations related to project management, including suggestions for project effectiveness and efficiency improvement. These are intended to management purposes and should be assumed by UNICEF as means of guaranteeing a better achievement of results in the project.**

Dissemination of information related to the project is crucial. It is to be realized both through better information and communication processes but also through meetings and exchanges. One example would be to gather all relevant stakeholders (including those who are not a part of the partnership like Health and Education sectors at county level) in common meetings and to strategically analyze the project implementation and impact. The same procedures should be envisaged at the local level, mainly through the Community Consultative Structures. In these respect, efforts should be deployed on involving county actors in supporting such activities.

Sustainability of the project needs to take into account mainly the human resources employed by the project. In this respect, UNICEF should undertake all necessary efforts to disseminate the evidence from the ground among decision makers and to influence the future employment of the social workers, including the commitment of the local authorities in preserving the practices.

In the same line, there is a need to stimulate and develop **local commitment of main stakeholders**, beyond the area of professional work of the social worker. This refer mainly to more structured approach towards the Community Consultative Structures but also to increase knowledge related to best practices which may be realized through strategic experience exchanges among stakeholders.

On a longer term, it needs to be envisaged a clear strategy to address local **knowledge, attitudes and practices** at community level, both in terms of public institutions and population as a whole. This refers mainly to capacity building of local stakeholders and specific design and concrete services for the beneficiaries aiming at changing KAP. UNICEF should support this in 2012, mainly through an effective implementation of the minimum package of basic services at the community level.

Last but not least, it is to be taken into account that the project generated during the first year a considerable amount of evidence related to vulnerabilities and population in need. This is to be used during the second year of implementation and baseline for action in 2012, contributing also

to a more coherent monitoring and oversight of the project, including measurability of results and impact.

- **Recommendations related to policy use of the findings in the evaluation. These are directly related to how UNICEF envisages developing its advocacy strategy in the area but should also take into account the external environment where they are expected to determine change or adjustments.**

The evaluation indicated with clear evidence that the project approach is cost-efficient. In this respect this information should be added to the one actually analyzed by UNICEF and partners to be the core elements when advocating for appropriate budgetary resources for the prevention area at community level.

Moreover, the evaluation generated information and knowledge about how effective activities and services are carried out at local level. The data is relevant in a context where UNICEF is developing a conceptual minimum package of basic social services at community level and need to be used to input the final design of the package. On another hand, the data may also help in designing and articulating the effective work, feasible and achievable, of social workers.

The main lesson learned from the project is that at present in Romania, the 'invisible' children are a fact. In only 96 communes, more than 3,000 'invisible' children were identified. How many others are expecting to be reached and helped in the other 2,765 communes of the country? The decision-makers at the local and national levels should be made aware of this fact … the 'invisible' children need help.

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7 Annexes – Descriptive results

7.1 Community Synthetic Fiche

The Synthetic Fiche was created by the evaluation team as response to the problem of obsolete, inconsistent or incomplete information collected as part of the project activities. The Fiche was elaborated taking into account the first fieldwork results, which were obtained from interviews with county stakeholders and focus groups with social workers. In was applied in all (96) communes covered by the project in November 2011. One commune (Trifești, Iași) did not respond.

The Synthetic Fiche includes data about activities carried out until November 1, 2011 regarding:

A. 'Invisible' children[55] (number of cases identified, types of vulnerabilities and types of solutions for each case). It has also attached a nominal list of cases;

B. Community censuses (data collection and data entry);

C. Activity of the Community Consultative Structure.

Figure A1. 1 Types of vulnerabilities and solutions used to describe the situation of each 'invisible' child, collected based on the Synthetic Fiche

Types of vulnerabilities
1. Children in households with many children, in poverty and precarious housing conditions
2. Children left behind by migrant parents, living in poverty or other difficult situations
3. Children at risk of neglect or abuse
4. Children with suspicion of severe diseases
5. Relinquished or at risk of child relinquishment
6. Children out-of-school and children at risk of school dropout
7. Teenage mothers who left school and/or are at risk of relinquishing the new-born child
8. Children without ID papers or documents
9. Other cases of vulnerable children

Type of actions/solutions
a. Identified case for which nothing has been done yet.
b. Identified case for which solutions have been initiated (case not being yet resolved).
c. Identified and resolved case (e.g.: child has ID papers, attends school, has disability certificates/ documents for receiving benefits, etc.).
d. Identified case, attempts of solutions have been enacted (even before project implementation), but the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'.
e. Identified case, for which the local actors consider 'there is nothing that can be done'.

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[55] By definition, an identified 'invisible' child is a child that faces one or more types of vulnerabilities (listed in figure 4 and A1.1) and is reached by the social worker through fieldwork activity (in our case, through the community census). We include among the identified cases those children who have been already known at the local level as being in a vulnerable situation but about which the field visit offer new insights (such as abuse, neglect, etc.), irrespective if his/her family have received some social benefits or services before the start of the project (e.g. social aid, heating allowance etc.).

A. 'Invisible' children

The social workers employed in the project have identified a number of 3,041 cases of 'invisible' children. The counties with the largest numbers of cases are Botoșani and Vaslui.

Table A1. 1 Number of 'invisible' children identified by county

County	BC	BT	BZ	IS	NT	SV	VS	VN	Total
Number of 'invisible' children	353	614	439	273	398	157	519	288	3,041

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: BC – Bacău; BT – Botoșani; BZ – Buzău; IS – Iași; NT – Neamț; SV – Suceava; VS – Vaslui; VN – Vrancea.

Three types of vulnerabilities predominate among the 'invisible' children: Large families with many children living in poverty and precarious housing conditions; Children at risk of abuse, neglect and violence; and Children not enrolled in school or at risk of school dropout.

At the county level, the distribution of the three predominant vulnerabilities remains the same, with the exception of Iași and Neamț. In Iași, there are significantly more children without ID papers, while in Neamț, children left behind by migrant parents, living in poverty or other difficult situations, are considerably more numerous.

Table A1. 2 Number of identified 'invisible' children by vulnerability type and county number

	Types of vulnerabilities									Total
	Tip1	Tip2	Tip3	Tip4	Tip5	Tip6	Tip7	Tip8	Tip9	
Bacău	249	14	39	9	77	8	6	8	3	353
Botoșani	494	15	348	10	128	20	13	8	44	614
Buzău	398	5	89	14	48	11	7	4	24	439
Iași	93	5	61	7	44	2	61	9	15	273
Neamț	296	45	41	16	53	21	14	12	18	398
Suceava	109	10	57	12	28	6	7	2	1	157
Vaslui	355	31	118	23	52	20	47	16	24	519
Vrancea	196	5	66	8	97	21	14	7	8	288
Total	2,190	130	819	99	527	109	169	66	137	3,041

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: Marked cells indicate the dominant pattern. Sum by row is larger than the corresponding value from the total column, because one child may face more than one type of vulnerability. Types of vulnerabilities: **Tip1.** Children in households with many children, in poverty and precarious housing conditions; **Tip2.** Children left behind by migrant parents, living in poverty or other difficult situations; **Tip3.** Children at risk of neglect or abuse; **Tip4.** Children with suspicion of severe diseases; **Tip5.** Children out-of-school and children at risk of school dropout; **Tip6.** Abandoned or at risk of child abandonment; **Tip7.** Children without ID papers or documents; **Tip8.** Teenage mothers who left school and/or are at risk of abandoning the newborn child; **Tip9.** Other cases of vulnerable children.

For almost half of the cases (1,252 or 43% of identified cases) no actions have been taken, 18% (524 cases) are considered with no solution and 39% of the cases have an identified solution (1,113 cases resolved or being resolved).

Table A1. 3 Distribution of cases by county and type of solution (number)

	Type of solutions					Total
	Sol1	Sol2	Sol3	Sol4	Sol5	
Bacău	260	22	7	6	58	353
Botoşani	420	50	23	70	51	614
Buzău	114	164	85	42	5	410
Iaşi	95	77	15	20	19	226
Neamţ	33	225	59	17	43	377
Suceava	15	70	9	5	39	138
Vaslui	215	111	76	45	13	460
Vrancea	100	68	52	19	72	311
Total	1,252	787	326	224	300	2,889

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: Data about solutions for 152 cases were missing. Types of solutions: **Sol1.** Identified case for which nothing has been done yet; **Sol2.** Identified case for which solutions have been initiated (case being resolved); **Sol3.** Identified and resolved case (e.g.: children has ID papers, attends school, has disability certificates/ documents for receiving benefits) etc.); **Sol4.** Identified case, attempts of solutions have been enacted (even before project implementation), but the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'; **Sol5.** Identified case, for which the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'.

In Bacău and Botoşani, the rate of cases in which no actions have been taken (Sol 1) is much higher than in the other counties. Thus, the proportion of unsolved cases in total identified cases varies significantly between a minimum of about 10%, in Neamţ and Suceava, and a maximum of 68-74%, in Botoşani and Bacău, respectively. In opposition, the proportion of cases that were resolved or are being resolved (Sol 2 and 3) in total identified cases reaches 75% in Neamţ, declines to 61% in Buzău, 57% in Suceava, 39-41% in Iaşi, Vaslui and Vrancea, and falls to a low of only 8-12% in Bacău and Botoşani. Regarding the cases for which local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done' (Sol 4 and 5), significantly more such cases are registered only in communes from Suceava and Vrancea counties.

Figure A1. 2 Distribution of cases by county and type of solution (%)
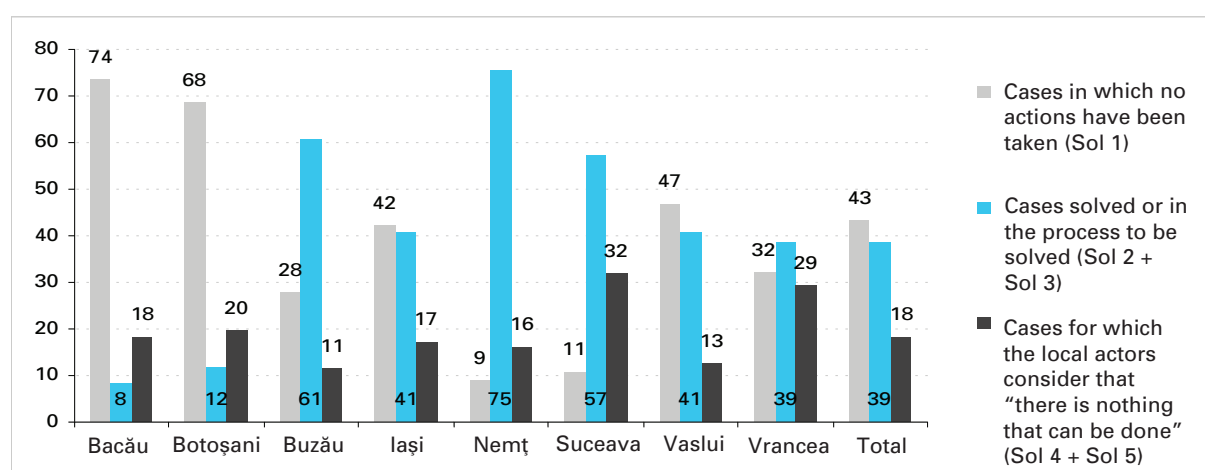
Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: Data about solutions for 152 cases were missing. See notes table A 1.3.

The developed communes have a significantly higher proportion of cases resolved or being solved in total identified cases than the underdeveloped communes.

Table A1. 4 Distribution of cases by commune type and by type of solutions

Type of commune	Type of solutions (number)						Type of solutions (%)			
	Sol1	Sol2	Sol3	Sol4	Sol5	Total	Sol 1	Sol2 + Sol 3	Sol 4 + Sol 5	Total
Underdeveloped communes	1,133	554	205	157	240	**2,289**	49	33	17	**100**
Developed communes	119	233	121	67	60	**600**	20	59	21	**100**
Total	**1,252**	**787**	**326**	**224**	**300**	**2,889**	**43**	**39**	**18**	**100**

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: Data about solutions for 152 cases were missing. (Sol 1) – cases for which no actions have been taken. (Sol 2 + Sol 3) – cases solved or in the process to be solved. (Sol 4 + Sol 5) – cases for which the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'. See also notes table A 1.3. Marked cells indicate significantly larger values.

The communes in which the social worker employed in the project works also in the mayoralty have a significantly higher proportion of cases solved or being solved in total identified cases compared with the communes where social worker is external to mayoralty.

Table A1. 5 Distribution of cases by type of solutions and social worker's status

Social Worker status	Type of solutions (number)						Type of solutions (%)			
	Sol1	Sol2	Sol3	Sol4	Sol5	Total	Sol 1	Sol2 + Sol 3	Sol 4 + Sol 5	Total
External to mayoralty	900	479	140	131	275	**1,925**	47	32	21	**100**
Internal to mayoralty	352	308	186	93	25	**964**	37	51	12	**100**
Total	**1,252**	**787**	**326**	**224**	**300**	**2,889**	**43**	**38**	**18**	**100**

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond. Notes: Data about solutions for 152 cases were missing. (Sol 1) – cases for which no actions have been taken. (Sol 2 + Sol 3) – cases solved or in the process to be solved. (Sol 4 + Sol 5) – cases for which the local actors consider that 'there is nothing that can be done'. See also notes table A 1.3. Marked cells indicate significantly larger values.

B. Community censuses (data collection and data entry)

Until November 1st, the activity of data collection was finished in two counties (Bacău and Botoșani), while Suceava is the county with the smallest number of questionnaires applied and introduced in the database (table A 1.6).

Regarding the data collection and data entry activities, there are not significant differences between the developed and underdeveloped communes or according to the status of the social worker.

Table A1. 6 Community census activity

	questionnaires % households up to November 1st	% questionnaires entered database up to November 1st
County		
Bacău	100	83
Botoşani	100	84
Buzău	84	69
Iaşi	94	64
Neamţ	98	88
Suceava	79	65
Vaslui	100	69
Vrancea	95	73
Type of commune		
Underdeveloped communes	96	75
Developed communes	91	75
Social Worker status		
External to mayoralty	96	76
Internal to mayoralty	90	71

Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifeşti (Iaşi) did not respond.

The majority of the social workers declared that the activity of data collection will be finished until November 15th. The counties with a higher number of social workers who declared that the fieldwork will take longer than mid November are Buzău and Iaşi. Again, there are no significant differences according to the community level of development or to the social worker status.

Figure A1. 3 The activity of data collection will be finished until Nov. 15th? according to county, community development and to social worker's status (number of communes)
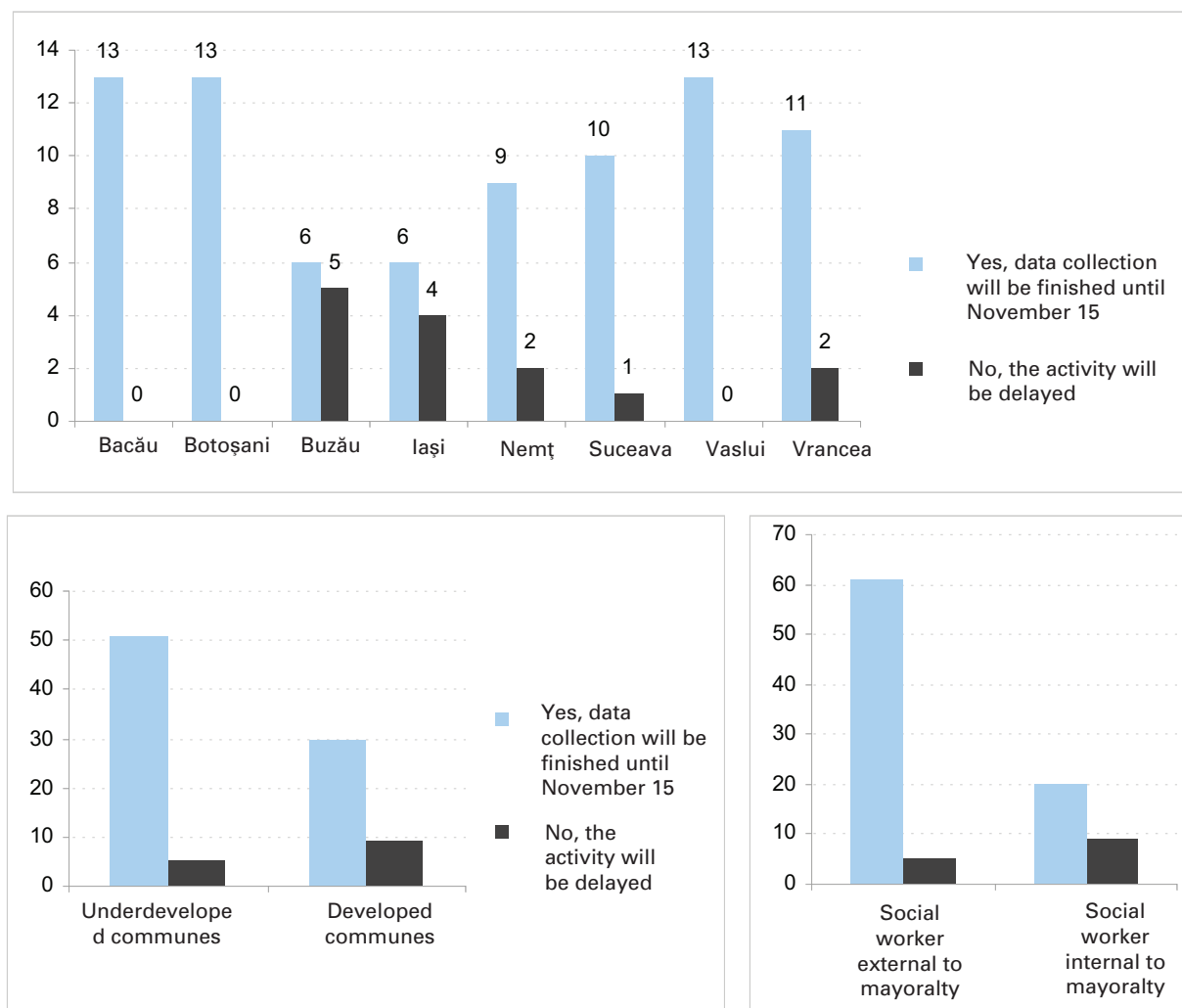
Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011. The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond.

C. Activity of the Community Consultative Structure (CCS)

In the big majority of the communities (89), the Community Consultative Structures were (re)established/ reorganized/ activated as a result of the project implementation. At the evaluation time, in 81 communes the CCSs were fully functional and in 14 they were still in the establishing process. The existence of conflicts among the CCS members was declared by only one social worker, but there are 12 communes where some of the members do not wish to voluntary participate to the meetings.

Figure A1. 4 Number of CCS meetings up to October 15th (number of communes)
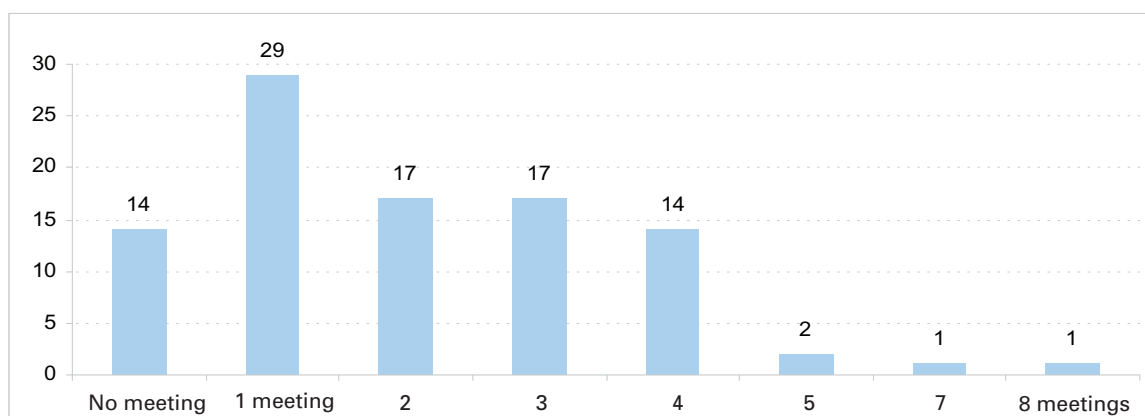
Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011 (N=95). The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond.

Figure A1. 5 Number of cases discussed at the CCS meetings up to October 15th (number of communes)
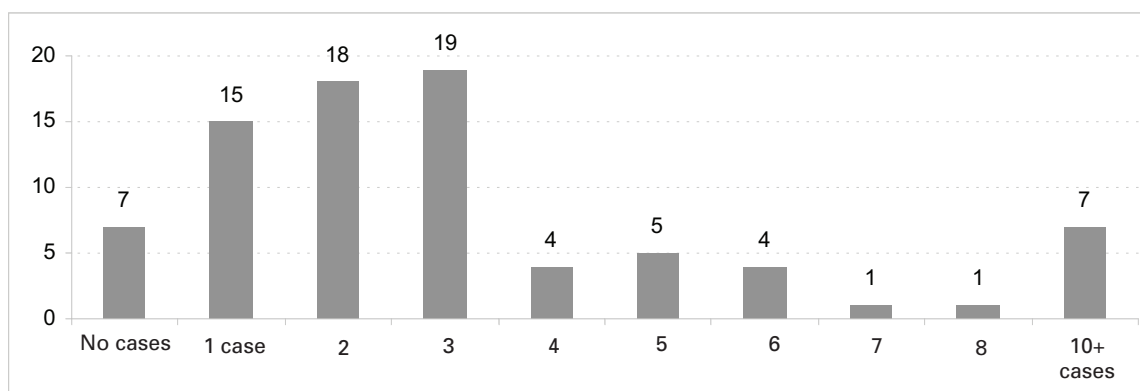
Data: Synthetic Fiche, cases identified until November 1, 2011 (N=81). The commune Trifești (Iași) did not respond and 14 communes did not organize any CCS meeting.

7.2 Interviews with county stakeholders

List of interviews with county stakeholders

Interview location	Supervisor	DGASPC	Prefecture
Bacău	Simona BOGHIU	Director	Prefecture representative
Botoşani	Lăcrămioara RADU	Director	Underprefect
Buzău	Ciprian Mihai PÂRVU	Director	Prefecture representative
Iaşi	Iuliana ÎNSURĂŢELU	Director	Underprefect
Neamţ	Victoria CIUTĂ	Director	Underprefect
Suceava	Florin TĂRNĂUCEANU	Director	Underprefect
Vaslui	Mirela FRANCIUG	Director	Underprefect
Vrancea	Daniela MANOLE	Director	Prefecture representative

7.2.1 Project supervisors

Help the invisible children

Interview guide

Respondent:
→ Supervisor
Name
....
Locality..
County ....

1. On a scale from 1 to 10 please assess how efficient is the 'Help the invisible children' project in your county.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. From the list of communes involved in the project (see the Annex) which are the ones under the mean county value and which are the ones above (considering efficiency)?

Minimum (what went wrong) ....

Maximum (what went well) ....

3. How many new cases of vulnerable children have been identified in each commune?
4. What happened with these cases?
5. In how many cases there have been concrete interventions?
6. Which has been the role of local stakeholders and CCS members in solving these cases?
7. How many visits have there been performed in the community?
8. Which were the main problems?
9. What should be changed in the future?

....

Main strengths of the project

Completion of the community census, able to show the social vulnerabilities at local level. The databases with relevant data regarding the communities allow decision makers to clearly identify the social problems. The community census produced surprising results even for the 'old' social workers or for the 'new' social workers living in the community and reckoning they know the 'vulnerable' cases. *"The project supplies a mirror of the community and a practical working procedure in social assistance, which has been enforced by staff outside of the system. The mayors are now aware of the importance of the database for the community. In this sense, a meeting with them, to reinforce its importance and multipurpose usage, would be very useful."* (Bacău Supervisor)

Improvement of collaboration with the local authorities. *"We consider one of the most important project achievements the fact that we have considerably improved our collaboration relationship with the mayoralties, especially with the mayor, secretary and accountant. We now communicate very easily, and the social worker is now known by everybody in the community."* (Buzău Supervisor)

Trigger collective responsibility at community level through the activation of Community Consultative Structures (CCS). There are no weekly or monthly CCS meetings, but when a vulnerable case has been identified, they understood they need discussing it with the other local actors too. In some communities, the necessity and role of CCS are not yet acknowledged; it is still the Local Council which takes the decisions. Out of the eight counties, Vrancea county stands out regarding the functioning of the CCS. *"In Vrancea county, the Community Consultative Structures are functioning. In most of the cases they meet once a month."* (Vrancea Supervisor) In some communes, these structures (under different names) have been already functioning, before project implementation.

Job opportunities and institutionalization of a new working procedure in social assistance. The project employed several 'new' social workers who were jobless at that moment. *„Of the 11 social assistants from the project, 4 are from the mayoralties and the other 7 were employed as the project started."* (Iași Supervisor). Either for the 'new' or 'old' social workers, the supervisors have generally positively assessed the social workers' involvement in the project. The project activities have offered them the chance to learn putting into practice a new way of conducting social assistance activities 'by the book'. They now have a clear image on the community and individual vulnerable cases to monitor or solution in cooperation with the members of the CCSs.

Evaluation of project efficiency

On a scale from 1 to 10, how efficient do you consider the project in your county?

General mark for efficiency at the county level
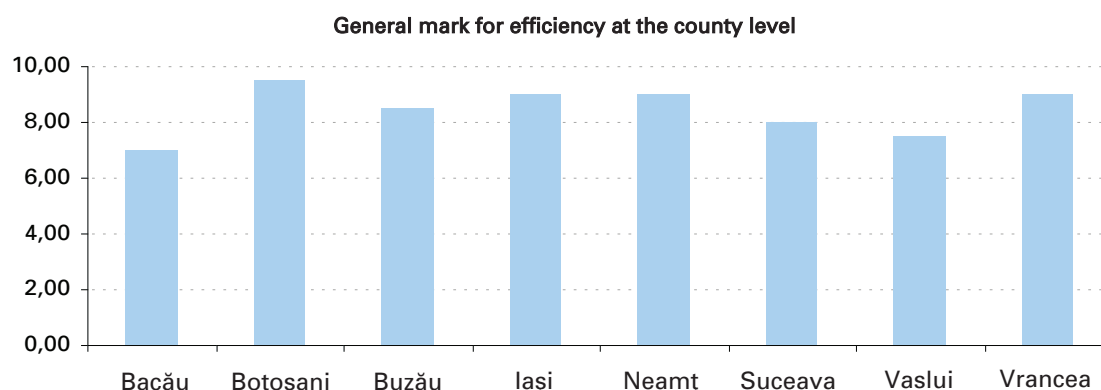
Data: Interviews with supervisors November 2011.

Bacău – *"It is difficult because we are working with new social workers. Almost none of the mayoralties has organized a meeting in which to present the social workers to the rest of the staff. It is especially hard for the young social workers, in many cases they didn't have a desk or a computer. In time, solutions have been identified, as sharing a computer with a colleague, etc"*.

Botoşani – *"I thought about a score of 9 because I didn't find maximum receptiveness in all mayoralties, but I am getting close to 10 because the people selected in the project are very involved and somehow offset argument number 1, so that I definitely go for 10"*.

Buzău – *"The project went generally well, although we had some difficulties especially in the beginning, until the local decision makers realized its importance. Still, some mayors, as is the case in Merei, are not really interested in the project. There is still a need for some time to consolidate what we have learnt and ensure that the social workers will continue to conduct fieldwork after UNICEF financing ceases"*.

Iaşi – *"It also was difficult with the structures … I told them to finish the questionnaires while the weather is still good, and we left aside these meetings with the structures … it was hard to start. The score is 9, no more than 9… as far as I am concerned we were not so efficient..."*.

Neamţ – *"The part with the questionnaires, with the database went well. This has been the responsibility of the social assistant from the project. There still are 2 large communes, with over 2,000 households (Tămăşeni and Săbăoani), which didn't finish applying the questionnaires; they still need to apply some 300 questionnaires. There are social assistants who finished entering the data too, while those who didn't finish yet, managed to introduce more than 50% of the questionnaires, though.*

On the part with activating the CCS, that pertained to the community, to the mobilization of the local actors, we had some problems (anticipated from the beginning of the project, though). CCS members are willing to collaborate, individually, however. The social assistants can't manage to get them together; they join very hardly. When there is a meeting not everybody comes, and at the next meeting come those who were not at the previous meeting.

CCS members still don't understand that the prevention activity is the responsibility of the community people, that the best solutions are within the community, in the environment of the child. The attitude of some CCS members, not all of them, was that << we, from child protection, are trying the throw the cat into their courtyard>>. They know that there is a public institution (DGASPC) which needs to solve the problems related to the children. It is not enough that the social assistants from the project are trying to activate these CCSs, if the people from the community have such mentality. It will take time to make them want services at the local level".

Suceava – Score 10 for the social assistants employed in the project, however score 8 for the mayoralties. *"They didn't get the 10 because there have been arguments regarding the contracts for the social assistants and nobody said so far that they want to employ the social assistants from the projects to the mayoralty. Otherwise, they were open, provided an office and computer for the social assistants.*

Vaslui – *"Between 7 and 8. The social assistants from the project were poorly selected, they are poorly trained, some are not reliable, they don't answer the phone..."*

Vrancea – The project generally went well, the social workers have done a good job and there is a good relationship with the mayor.

Communes ranking below the average score and what went wrong

Bacău – Below the average are Berzunţi, Dealu Morii, Parincea, Sănduleni and Ungureni. One special case is Berzunţi - even though here the project didn't go very well, the social worker employed in the project has been evaluated with a maximum mark. The difficulties for project implementation are represented by 'the wall raised by the mayor', the low performance of the social worker or difficulty of identifying the members and organizing the meetings of the Community Consultative Structure. None of the newly employed social workers had previous training on social assistance.

Botoşani – *"In Todireni, the social assistant lagged a little bit behind, until she managed to be visible in the mayoralty and in the community; she didn't understand from the beginning that you need to make efforts in order to become visible within the mayoralty, but now she is involved and works very well. Also, in Coşuţca the authorities were not quite involved".*

Buzău – Below the average are Bisoca, Calvini, Cătina, Pietroasele and Scoarţoasa. The assessment is not for the social workers, but for the whole project development. The difficulties are mainly associated with the mayor. *'The mayors have no chiefs above them, they think they can do whatever they want. They only have political party chiefs. They also put the social situation in the last place. Things like social vulnerabilities are little fuzzy for them'.* In some specific cases, there were also problems with the accountant, as he refused to pay the social worker (Merei). *'As a general remark, I think what is the hardest is only beginning. The social workers in the project are very good practitioners but they don't know how to write a report. They told me: we are afraid of the final project report. I will help them of course. We also need to think about a mechanism to make them go out in the field after the project ends. Not everyday but from time to time, to make sure they properly monitor what happens in the community'.*

Iaşi – There are several communes where the project had implementation difficulties. These are Coarnele Caprei, Cozmeşti, Lespezi and Ţibăneşti. *"In Coarnele Caprei... the lady treats the situations quite emotionally, she is very involved emotionally, which decreases her efficiency;*

she cries a lot, which is not fit for social assistance; this is a weakness in social assistance …In Cozmești, it is rather bad down there… there is no support from the local authorities…. In Lespezi, things are little under the average; I expected more from the lady, who also is social assistant with the mayoralty; she is close to becoming a pensioner and she is superficial and I sent my colleagues from Pașcani to assist her with those support groups … so we can get further with the project. The situation is different in Țibănești. here we have the mayor's wife ... In general I can say that where the things didn't go well, it is because of the local authorities, and of the social assistant who didn't get involved and didn't put in effort".

Neamț – *"With the CCS from Războieni and Dragomirești things are not working. In Bâra too, CCS members didn't manage to meet. In Războieni things are not going well also because of the project employee, the social assistant is little sociable, doesn't manage to accomplish very well al the activities".*

Vaslui – *"In Dimitrie Cantemir and Gherghești, the social assistants are unreliable, the medical assistant is unreliable, he promises to solve a problem, a vulnerable case and he doesn't do it".*

Suceava – Below 8 for Pătrăuți commune. The people there *"didn't understand a thing. They need the project, but they don't want it. I told the mayor, please tell me, how is that? That he doesn't want to get complicated..."*. Here thee have also been problems with the social worker's contract, with the administrative part of employing a social assistant; it took more than a month to clarify this matter.

Vrancea – Below the average are Dumbrăveni, Milcovul and Tătăranu. The social workers employed in these communes have previously been part of DGASPC (Milcovul and Tătăranu, in Dumbrăveanu is an internal social worker). The mark is more to differentiate them from the rest of communes and it takes into consideration the involvement of local stakeholders and the social worker's relationship with the rest of mayoralty's staff.

The communes ranking above the average and what went well

Bacău – Above the average are the rest of communes, evaluated with the same score (7-8): Blăgești, Colonești, Corbasca, Găiceana, Gura Văii, Parava, Răchitoasa, Stănișești. *"I consider that the relationship with the social workers from the mayoralty needs improvement, they are not yet a team. Also, lack of formal training in social assistance is both a disadvantage and an advantage. Disadvantage because they don't yet know how to deal with the cases of social assistance, they don't know how to make the bureaucratic work ('dosariada'). Advantage as the lack of routine allows them to see, to identify the vulnerable cases and most important, to be open to seek solutions for them".*

Botoșani – *"In Ibănești, the social assistant (although has a different training than that of social assistant, graduate of the Faculty of Biology) was careful and took into consideration the full support of SPAS from the commune; was visible in the community and had good determination to do things well. In Răuseni, the social assistant, although not a local people, and despite that fact that the mayor was not very attentive with the social matters, managed to make the mayor get aware of the role which the social assistant has within the community; was very involved (tried to organize a support group at the school, organized CCS meetings, presented the identified cases to the CCS)".*

Buzău – The highest mark (10) is for Vadu Pașii. It is a large commune, with a very good social worker and the mayor has also supported the project. We consider this social worker as the best practitioner in Buzău county. Above the average are also Brădeanu, Costești, Merei, Vernești and Viperești. *"Most of the social workers in the project have a large experience and if you go in the field, the beneficiary won't let you go away without recording his/her problems, they are telling you all their problems. They have also seen the benefits of fieldwork: discovering new cases or new vulnerabilities of old cases ... I think that the crucial moment for the project will be when they see concrete results for the beneficiaries, done without major financial efforts, this is the moment when the project can start developing on its own and can also spread to other communities".*

Iași – *"Aroneanu is above the average. The social assistant from there is not quite convinced about the necessity for the structure to meet, but I'll go there and explain him, so that we can accomplish all the objectives in the project … In Ceplenița the structure functioned here too.* Communities above the average are Vânători, Dolhești, Focuri, Mironeasa and Trifești. *"The social assistant was the basis, but also the support from the authorities. For instance, at Vânători, they are a little above the average, the lady is very serious and gets involved, but she doesn't have the support of the mayoralty. They have a secretary there who treats her very ironically, like the last of people, because he doesn't want her there… that is clear. He is relative with the social assistant and sees that women as c competitor for that job. At Dolhești they are little over the average, Focuri is over the average, and the lady here really put it all out, Mironeasa is over the average, Trifești is over the average. To give you the extremities, Mironeasa is the first and Cozmești is the last. They even hardly answer the phone, it's clear that they don't get involved."*

Neamț – In Români, Bahna, Boghicea, Brusturi, Oniceni, Valea Ursului things go well. In Săbăoani and Tămășeni too, things go well, just that the communities are larger. *"The people did their job".* At Români *"it was not just the man from the project who worked hard"* to succeed joining the CCS; the mayor too, and the other people from the mayoralty also helped. The supervisor attended a CCS meeting in this commune, where the project was presented. Even though not all CCS members have an open attitude towards the project's activities, the people from the mayoralty want it very much, they want *"things to be done there ".*

Suceava – *"The social assistants from the communes Dornești, Valea Moldovei, Izvoarele Sucevei, Râșca are in the top. They are the best considering the way they managed to apply the questionnaires, their involvement in provision of services by the mayoralty and for how they were supported by the mayoralty staff. For instance, at Dornești the mayor is very involved in the project and the social assistant has a very good collaboration with the mayor. Therefore, the social assistant from Dornești attended CCS meetings, applied all the questionnaires, entering many of them into the database. The collaboration of the social assistants with the mayor is very important for the activities within the project. Therefore, at Dornești, not just the social assistant, but also the mayor gets the first prize. The same with Râșca the mayor too, not just the social assistant gets the first prize.*

In the communes where the social assistants collaborate directly with the mayor, they manage to do their job better; in the situations where the mayors empowered other people, the secretary or someone else, with the activities of the project, things don't go so smooth".

Vaslui – Above the average are Coroiești, Grivița, Cozmești, Ivănești. *„The social assistants are very good, reliable and prompt. I also think that it is of great help that they also are social assistants in the mayoralty, helps them a lot... The social assistant from the project too, who is the wife of the mayor, managed very well because she was supported by the mayoralty with the donations, fund raising."*

Vrancea – Best evaluations are for Cârligele, Gugești, Jariștea, Ruginești, Sihlea and Slobozia Bradului. Some of these are large communes, with various social problems. The best-practice case for the functioning of the Community Consultative Structure is Popești. Here the new social worker has a very good relationship with the local decision makers and has even succeeded to resolve a case at her own initiative (a letter requesting support from Kanal D).

How many new cases of vulnerable children were identified in your county?

Number of new cases of vulnerable children has generally been hard to be estimated by the supervisors. „I can't tell you, I should look into the papers. Anyhow between 1 and 10 in all communes, but can't tell exactly, maybe 5-7 if you want an interval between 1 and 10; there have been communes with 5 cases, or 4 cases, 8 cases, but no more than 10" (Botoșani Supervisor). The supervisor from Neamț doesn't know how many new cases were discovered, but "there are few". The same is true for the Iași supervisor "Figures… I should look into all the reports, but I can send them to you, no figures now. If I knew, I would have prepared the data for each commune. I don't have a clear statement now, didn't draw the line. I intended to see it all at the end of the project". In Vaslui too the supervisor doesn't have a clear situation with each single case, considers they will come out in the analytical reports. In Suceava the supervisor doesn't know the number, considers that the project didn't focus on this problem, on the centralization of the new identified cases. The social assistants focused on data collection, and after the questionnaires will be entered into the database, a clear image of the vulnerable cases will result; only after the data are introduced into the database, one can make analyses.

The supervisor from Buzău has asked further information on what represents a "new" case, as the county has mostly employed internal social workers. *"They are used to cases coming to the mayoralty and asking for support and now they need to learn that they have to go to the cases, they are supposed to go in the field and identify them"*(Buzău supervisor). A similar methodological discussion has also been conducted with Bacău supervisor. The supervisor from Vrancea has collected detailed statistical information on project activities, including the number of cases.

Typology of the cases of vulnerable children newly identified as result of project's activities.

"From the reports of the social assistants, most cases were identified at Mironeasa. The social assistant from the commune had initiative and sent an official paper as project team member, to the civil records office of the mayoralty and to the school where there have been cases of school dropout, a letter to the mayor. I also attended those meetings of the CCS at Mironeasa and we discussed every single case. At Focuri we discussed, for instance, cases of minor mothers. There have been cases of minor mothers identified at Focuri and the doctor didn't know 2 of the 7 identified cases. I understood that there are 2 doctors, and just one of them knew, but the community being small, they both know. There have also been communes with no special problems…" (Iași Supervisor).

In Botoșani, communities with many cases include Albești, Coțușca (very poor community, far from town, "forgotten by the people") and Cristinești (large Roma communities).

The social assistants from the project identified mainly: Children with health problems which didn't have a certified disability; Poverty problems, which were known, but nobody visited them at home and „only now they have seen the reality, how bad is the reality and they discussed the problem of those people within the community"; Cases of school dropout, where the social

assistants have talked to the teachers, to the parents and managed to bring many children back to school; Children over 14 with no ID papers and the social assistants have talked to the parents and to the police to solve the problem. Some of these cases are 'old' cases, those which the mayoralty knew of, but nothing was done for them so far.

What has happened with the newly identified cases of vulnerable children?

Counseling activities. The social assistants counseled the families about the services they can get, and about the papers needed to get these services.

Bureaucratic paperwork. The social assistants employed in the project were involved in the management of the cases filed with DGASPC, they collected information about the situation of those children and informed further on the people from the directorate, worked together with the social assistants from the mayoralty to complete the files.

Identification of solutions within the community. Some of the social assistants presented the cases to the mayoralty (mostly if they did not succeed in organizing a CCS meeting) or in the CCS meeting. As a result, part of the cases remained to be monitored by the mayoralty, while other, came under DGASPC jurisdiction with protection measures. For instance, family placement for the children with parents working abroad and no longer support them and they are living with the grandparents (at least one case in each community) or emergency placement in the centre for emergency placements. The project raised awareness about problems which have not been previously seen as vulnerabilities – for instance in some communes, cases of children with disabilities who didn't go to the doctor so far have not been regarded as a problem. There are also cases in which no solutions have been identified as it is the case with children living in poverty in precarious conditions. *They were identified and remain in SPAS monitoring. The vulnerable families... this is what we are speaking about, families with many children and precarious state, and big poverty ... I would suggest them to identify some NGOs for material assistance. I communicate with them (the social assistants) all the time, by e-mail, by phone and I help them, guide them where to go when they find a case, what to do. Practically, we can say that there are situations which are not solved for the time being [...] Solved cases of children with no IDs, we have a problem here. They must pay a tax with the mayoralty to make the ID and then their children can get the birth certificate... They never had this money... I talked to the mayor to put money from the emergency fund... discussed this at the structure level ...".* (Iași Supervisor)

Monitoring visits of the social assistants to the vulnerable families have been rather few. *"There were not many visits of the social assistants to the vulnerable families; didn't quite go. This is why I say that I was expecting more from some people, particularly from those who are social assistants in the mayoralty ... They applied the questionnaires, observed new cases of vulnerability, announced the police verbally... and just about that. On the other hand, at Mironeasa, the social assistant visited the new cases..."* (Iași Supervisor).

Which was the role of the local actors and of CCS members in solving these cases?

Solutions identified in CCS meetings, facilitated by the social assistants. The social assistants have put all efforts in identifying the CCS members, re-organizing the structures if necessary and

'pushing for a meeting in which to discuss the cases of vulnerable children'. The solutions have been identified in collaboration between local actors. *"It is very important… The town mayor, the mayoralty secretary, the police which helped… in another place it was the medical assistant from the commune… a teacher from the school"* (Iaşi Supervisor). In some cases, the meetings of CCS members are informal, 2-3 members meet; it is more difficult to have meetings with all the *members, to make a final report: "This because the law says that "it is possible" and not compulsory for the CCS to meet."* (Suceava Supervisor)

Individual collaboration with CCS members. The social assistants collaborated well with CCS members, but individually. The CCS are useful because the more people are involved in a problem, the greater are the odds to find a good solution. However, given the attitude existing in some mayoralties, this is very hard to do; the participation of CCS members in the meetings is seen as an extra task in their schedule and because it is not compulsory, they don't come all the time or they don't all come. "At the beginning of the project, conventions were drawn up with the mayoralties by which they undertook (among other) to activate/establish the CCS. So that, on paper, there is a CCS in every commune of the project, but they are not all operational"(Suceava Supervisor).

How many visits in the community did the supervisors?

The general response is that supervisors visited once a month each commune. The visits consisted in checking whether the social assistant applied the questionnaires, discussing the problems encountered in the field or in introducing the questionnaires into the database. In addition, some counties organized a meeting with all the social assistants once a month. The supervisors generally keep in touch by phone or e-mail with every social assistant.

Main problems

In addition to the difficulties mentioned so far, the following have been added:

Concentration of many activities in a short period of time. The social assistants from the project didn't accomplish so far the activities concerning the organization of support groups, of training courses *"simply because there was no time. Too many activities at one time…"* (Suceava Supervisor). How much these activities will be accomplished in the future depends on the analysis to be done during the project (showing what is useful and what can actually be done) and on the available financial resources.

The lack of formal training in social assistance of many social workers employed with the project. *"The people employed in the project don't have the necessary training to conduct the activities of counseling, organization of support groups, organization of training courses. The initial training course provided by UNICEF was brief. We cannot ask them to do such activities… For part of them it is difficult to draw up an analysis report and they will need help… for a short period… everything seems to have been done in a hurry. The social assistants too had to be trained better, particularly those employed just for this project… the training courses were brief, just 3 days… they needed to have studied more cases, discussed about them …"* (Iaşi Supervisor).

Relationship of the 'new' social worker with the 'old' social worker. In some cases there is a feeling of competition between the social assistant from the mayoralty and the one employed by the project.

Local authorities' attitude towards social problems and importance of the social assistant's work. Some local authorities summarize the activity of social assistance to paying the benefits, without highlighting the part of social services too. This is partly explained by the focus on bureaucratic work of the social assistant. In addition, employment of a new staff member made some mayors realize that he/she might be useful for the mayoralty's activities. This does not necessarily mean for social assistance services: "The people from the mayoralties realized that that employed person is useful for them, maybe they will want to use it further, as they want, not as <<we>> want" (Suceava Supervisor).

Lack of predictability concerning the new social worker's employment status. The questions on the status of the social assistants starting with next year, doesn't allow them to think ahead, what would be necessary for the community or for the support of the vulnerable children. *"When I know that in December I am going home, why should I think what to do? If you tell me that I am to…, then I can get mobilized and find all kinds of variants; with the expertise I have now, I can do it. But if I know that in December I will go home, why bother thinking?"* (Suceava Supervisor).

The large volume of applied questionnaires has discouraged some of the social workers to continue to be part of this project. *"Considers that 3-4 social assistants employed in the project will not remain "in this thing" next year, if there will be questionnaires to apply again (because of the effort presumed by this activity)."* (Suceava Supervisor). In addition, their effort has been quantified not only by the volume of questionnaires, but also by the distance covered within the commune (some villages are 10-15 km apart and there is no transportation means).

What should be changed in the future?

Stressing the role of CCS in each commune. Passing from the formal role 'set on paper' of the CCS to the actual functioning of these structures is a process that still needs incentives to be started and set into an institutionalized administrative procedure. *"On the paper there is a CCS in every commune from Botoșani, but their members don't know their mission because the local authorities don't know how to clearly express it. They know they belong to a structure, but they really don't know what exactly they are supposed to do and this is why I think that they should have some training, or at least a program making them familiar with their assignments, with their regulations, with what they are supposed to do in the commune. I say it is absolutely necessary that this happens next year"* (Supervisor, Botoșani). *"There should be some training for CCS members. These structures from the communes require paying particular attention. We might organize a meeting with them and explain them what they might do and how important they are; that they are the key-people there and that the other people listen to them. Being opinion leaders from the communities, they might change attitude at the local level about the upbringing and education of children* (Supervisor, Neamț). *They [CCS members] should have discussions on concrete cases because the solution might be next to them, but they just can't see it* (Supervisor, Botoșani).

Ensuring stability of social assistant's position within the mayoralty. *"First, the social assistants should receive authority within the mayoralty and the guarantee that they work there, that their job is safe. The mayors will realize it is better to have a person doing just social assistance work;*

this will strengthen the position of the social assistants. The position of the social assistants will also be strengthened by the fact that the authorities will know that the project continues, by the fact that everything what the social assistant did in the community is also presented to the public (in the meetings of the Local Council)" (Suceava Supervisor).

Increase local administrative capacity to deliver social services through: (i) ensuring human resources - where there are no social assistants in the mayoralty, a social assistant should be urgently employed (the law doesn't allow, as it is still a blockade of posts in the public sector); (ii) developing a strategy for the social services in each commune; (iii) certification/ accreditation of the social services (for instance only two mayoralties from those involved in the project in Botoșani are certified as supplier of social services); (iv) increase mayoralty capacity to access funds for projects – this is especially difficult as at the local level they don't have money for the co-financing part and they can't hire additional staff for the time being.

Changing the rules for selection of social assistants. *"There should not be this condition that the mayor appoints the project people"* (Iași Supervisor). *"The selection of the social assistants, the change of the selection criteria, more training for the new-comers into the project, observance of the attributions of each position within the project* (Vaslui Supervisor).

Continuing the fieldwork activity in the next year of project implementation. The social assistants should not repeat the community census next year. *They should continue fieldwork activities but should also focus more on setting support groups and on a more active presence in the community, on meeting with the parents etc.* (Suceava Supervisor).

7.2.2 DGASPC Directors

Help the invisible children

Interview Guide

Respondent:
→ 1. Prefecture representative
→ 2. DGASPC Director

Name ....
Locality..
County...

1. Which are in your opinion the strengths of the 'Help the invisible children' project in your county?
....

2. Can you tell us how many new cases of vulnerable children have been identified in your county? What happened with these cases?
....

3. On a scale from 1 to 10 please assess how efficient is the 'Help the invisible children' project in your county.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. From the list of communes involved in the project (see the Annex) which are the ones under the mean county value and which are the ones above (considering efficiency)?

Minimum (what went wrong) ....

Maximum (what went well) ....

(if there are no minimum cases, which are in general the project weak points, perceived as obstacles in achieving the maximum efficiency level of the project)

5. Which would you say are the project weaknesses that should be addresses in the future to increase the project efficiency?
....

6. What should be changed in the future?
....

Main strengths of the project

Increase of the local administrative capacity to solve social problems. The project has succeeded strengthening the capacity of the local authorities to manage the social cases by employing new social assistants besides the existing ones. The census of the community has provided an inventory of the local social cases, including vulnerable children. The project offered to the social assistants training opportunities and, more important, practical experience: *„Many of them have general training, but this specific training helps them a lot and of course the children"* (DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

Improvement of collaboration relationship with the mayoralties. The project has succeeded consolidating a good collaboration with the mayoralties. It has also provided a start in raising awareness of the local authorities on their role in prevention activities and promoting children rights. *"It all starts there, they are the main and first ones who should propose and help the children or the family in a state of crisis; it all starts from there, and there are mayoralties which know this and we collaborate very well with them"* (DGASPC Director, Neamț).

Focus on prevention activities. *"The project stresses on prevention and this solves a lot of problems. This is good, focus on prevention not on intervention"* (DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

How many new cases of vulnerable children were identified in your commune? What has happened with these cases?

"They are...I think they are vulnerable...as far as I know, as a commune, as standard of living, well I think that Valea Ursului is vulnerable, Boghicea is newer, I don't know their incomes, but I can't tell you that now they identified a child or...no, on the brink of, I don't know, school dropout or family abandonment, no" (DGASPC Director, Neamț).

"About 45 vulnerable families plus 32 with no identification papers: birth certificate or identity cards" (DGASPC Director, Iași).

"I can't tell you at this moment because it is not my direct problem... but there are cases ... I can tell you that the identification of such cases after the project started is much better... The communes selected in the project are communes with problems, with large families having 9-10 children supervised by the system of social assistance. How many of these new cases have been solved? It depends on what you understand by solving... interventions were made in all cases" (DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

Evaluation of project efficiency

On a scale from 1 to 10, how much efficient do you evaluate the project in your county? Only three DGASPC directors supplied an assessment: Iași – 9, Neamț – 9, and Vaslui 7-8.

In Buzău, Bacău and Vrancea the Directors have supplied general qualitative project evaluations, without assessing a score for efficiency. In Botoșani: „Didn't feel a direct contribution. The specialist (supervisor) can tell you best" (DGASPC Director, Botoșani).

Communes ranking below the average score and what went wrong

Regarding the communes ranking below or above the average, the Directors have commonly declared that 'the supervisor knows best'.

"I don't know, must ask the supervisor; I don't know the communes, but generally, where it went wrong it is because the authorities didn't get involved too much, they are not interested to solve the vulnerable cases" (DGASPC Director, Neamț). *"The specialist is the best one who can tell you..."* (DGASPC Director, Botoșani). *"I know that in Cozmești the social assistant had a low level of involvement. The communes where things went wrong are the ones in which the mayors didn't want to cooperate"* (DGASPC Director, Iași). *"There also are communities such as Pungești, Gherghești, where the mayor doesn't get involved even if the social assistant does his/her best. If you don't have support it's kind of impossible to solve the problem. Where the work is not going well, it is because the <<community pillars>>, the leadership of the community, the school, the church, don't get involved"*(DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

"Therefore, in my opinion, most or anyhow..., those from the localities, if the directorate doesn't do its job they call the press and we will see what happens to us. We are God for all these children and if we don't intervene, I don't know what might happen" (DGASPC Director, Neamț).

Communes ranking above the average score and what went well

"I don't know the communes, but generally, where it went well it is because the authorities get involved very much, make plans for intervention, think of solutions" (DGASPC Director, Neamț). "I know that in Mironeasa the social assistant is very well trained, very involved and with initiative in solving the identified cases" (DGASPC Director, Iași). *"They are above the average level, Coroiești, where the intervention is rather quick, Ivănești, where they are very prompt. This ranking above the average is due to the interest of the social assistants and of the mayor. In these communities, as soon as a problem appears, the mayor gets involved directly, they are very active"* (DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

Main weaknesses which should be improved in order to enhance efficiency

Real functioning of the Community Consultative Structures (CCS). Many CCS have not been functional; even community representatives who are not CCS members should get involved (for instance, every teacher might do something when a child drops out of school).

Short period of implementation for complex project activities.

Weaknesses of the public administration system. *"I can't identify the weaknesses. A weakness, not of the project, rather of the entire system, is the lack of staff trained in the field of social assistance working in the local communities. In many communities, the first one that got fired was the social assistant and they assigned other people to do this job, such as the librarian, the agricultural agent... they don't even know what social assistance is... how can they do a social survey, a primary intervention; the project allowed them to be trained and gradually they might be formed for social assistance too"* (DGASPC Director, Vaslui).

What should be changed in the future?

Fostering the CCS role in the identification and solving of the case. The CCS should have at least one meeting a month. This would help prevention activities at the local level and make easier also DGASPC responsibilities. If in the first stage of the project, the local actors were more involved and accountable (as they have known the most appropriate ways to intervene), the need for DGASPC support is expected to increase in the latter stages.

Increase administrative capacity for providing social assistance at local level through: (i) specialized human resources - training of the social assistants (quarterly, by area); dissemination of information, discussion of the vulnerable cases, how they intervene, etc. *„a much closer link through these meetings... might make them feel, understand exactly what has to be done and don't forget that the social assistants must deal with those cases. I think that such meetings where they hear things, learn things, share opinions, experience, might help them and the project to be accomplished properly, be efficient."* (DGASPC Director, Neamț), *"If we remain stuck in bureaucracy/theory only, with no practice, the project will not accomplish its goal..."* (DGASPC Director, Botoșani); (ii) continuing the project until the social assistant has fully understood and correctly applied the necessary procedures; (iii) provision of services through a day care centre.

Change the social assistance system in Romania. *"I think that the entire idea about social assistance should be changed. Think it otherwise; make it an active social assistance, not a passive one. Intervene in the family and involve the family, not just give them money every month and… if possible transfer the money directly to the pub. This would be one of the active measures, but for this we need properly trained people monitoring those cases, because no matter what we would do, there are areas where the money don't solve the problems of the adult people or of the children."* (DGASPC Director, Vaslui)

7.2.3 Prefecture representatives

Main strengths of the project

The results associated with the community census are considered among the main strengths of the project: (i) identification of vulnerabilities at the local level; (ii) completion of an electronic database with the vulnerable cases and community population; (iii) raising awareness among local authorities on the social problems – some mayors from localities not covered by the project now want an analysis of the vulnerable cases in their communities.

Good participation of the local authorities in the project. There has even been an enthusiasm of the local authorities to participate in the project. *"It looks like there has been a competition; they came and told us <<we heard about the project, can you get us in?>>"* (Prefecture representative, Neamț).

How many new cases of vulnerable children were identified in your county? What has happened with these cases?

Difficult to estimate number of cases of vulnerable children identified in the project. *"It is hard for me to give you statistics. The supervisor may help you with this"* (Underprefect, Botoșani). The situation is similar in the rest of the counties. Some of the Prefecture representatives have associated the typology of vulnerable cases with cases of children left behind by migrant parents and Roma communities.

On a scale from 1 to 10, how efficient do you evaluate the project in your county?

"Any project can be improved; the social assistants got involved, are efficient; the people from DGASPC monitored the social assistants. I evaluate their activity as being very good" (Underprefect, Botoșani).

What went well and what went wrong?

Communes ranking below the average score and what went wrong - Don't know

Communes ranking above the average and what went well

"We know nothing about what has been going on lately. Otherwise, if they had problems, they would have asked for our help. But they didn't, so it means that the project went well" (Prefecture representative, Buzău and Bacău).

Main weaknesses which should be improve in order to enhance efficiency

Blockade of posts in the public sector. *"At Brusturi there is a building fully equipped to function as day care centre, but the people from the mayoralty cannot hire staff for it. The same situation is for the gyms too, the swimming pools (from the county, not from the communities included in the project) which don't function because they are not staffed. The only employment can be done for some services provided by the local authorities, if they are single positions, but very few"* (Prefecture representative, Neamț).

Attitude of local authorities. Some representatives of local public administration tend to pass on the problems to other state institutions, as high as possible, even to Bucharest (Prefecture representative, Neamț).

Lack of information between the institutions involved in the project. *"The people implementing the project should inform periodically all the partners about the progress of the project"* (Underprefect Suceava, Vaslui). However, the lack of information is seen by some Prefecture representatives as a 'good sign' that the project is going well (see citation above from Buzău and Bacău).

Too little time allocated for CCS meetings did not allow a good achievement of this activity.

What should be changed in the future

Raise awareness about CCS responsibilities.

Ensure financial sustainability. There should be a continuity of the project *"we can't burden the mayoralties with the payment of these social assistants if the project stops"* (Underprefect, Botoșani).

Analysis of project's intermediary results. *"If there will be a report about what has been done so far (maybe present the evaluation report of all the partners), solutions will be sought and proposals will be forwarded for the future progress of the project"* (Underprefect, Suceava).

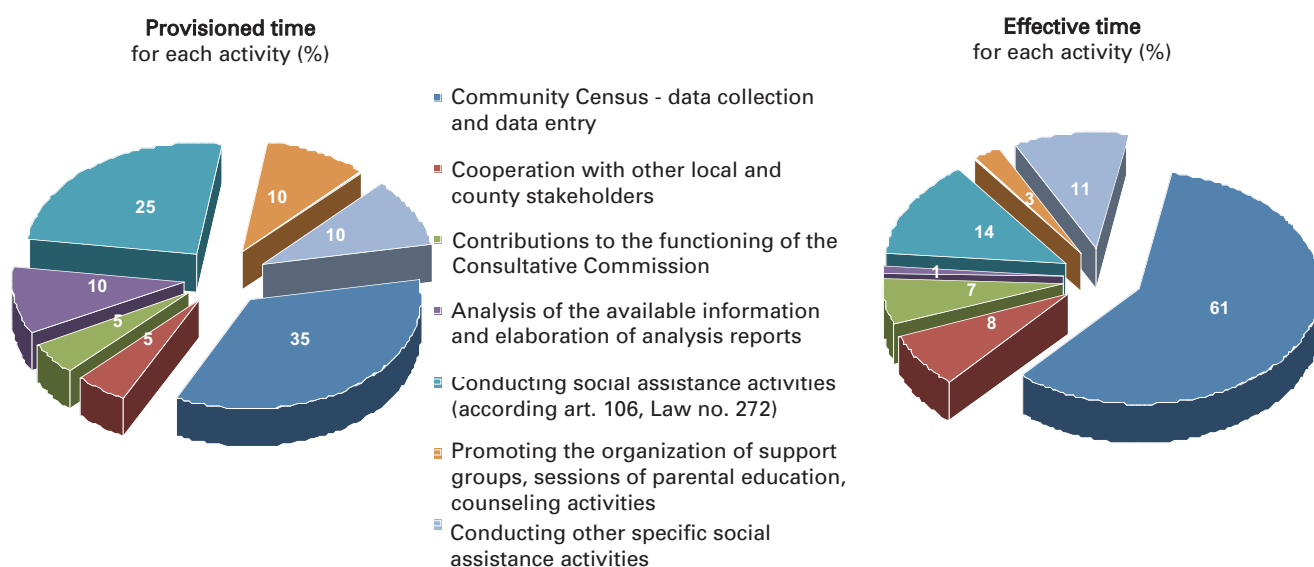**Dissemination of information and best practices.** In most counties, the Prefecture representatives agree with the idea of organizing a county-level meeting with representatives of the communes involved in the project (including CCS members). The Prefecture might facilitate such meeting organized with the aim to stimulate CCS functioning and propagation of good practices among project participants.

7.3 Focus-Groups with social workers

All focus group discussions were held to the DGASPC premises. The recruitment of participants was done by supervisors. However, supervisors did not take part in focus groups. The focus group guide is based on the structure and data provided by the supervisors' monitoring reports, including activities carried out until September 15, 2011. The guide was prepared as a power point presentation. Each participant received a printed copy and they were encouraged to make notes on it. In the end, the copies were collected without any information that would permit the identification of the participant who handed it over. The analysis of data is presented below, following the same sequence of topics as the guide.

SECTION (I) Allocation of time across activities

All participants confirmed the gap between the provisioned and the effective time working time as shown on the slide. The community census consumed most of their working time, much more than provision and than expected.

Provisioned time for each activity (%)

Effective time for each activity (%)

- Community Census - data collection and data entry
- Cooperation with other local and county stakeholders
- Contributions to the functioning of the Consultative Commission
- Analysis of the available information and elaboration of analysis reports
- Conducting social assistance activities (according art. 106, Law no. 272)
- Promoting the organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities
- Conducting other specific social assistance activities

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011. Slide presented in the focus groups with social workers, who confirmed the data.

"So that in the end of the project, I can really tell you that during the training I didn't think it will be like that, but the field work had its saying. (...) a lot of work for us. The mayors didn't believe us. On the third day I started to cry. People keep being reticent... less than every 10 houses they were asking us, don't you give us money?" (Social worker, Focus Group Neamț)

"Data collection took us a lot of time because there are houses with large distances in between, and there is time for applying the questionnaires, then there is the time for explaining to each person, it takes you 10 minutes and then other 10 minutes until you complete it .... I had a large commune and I couldn't organize those meetings with counseling or support groups and at the same time collect and entry the data. We also had to work on Saturday and Sunday, otherwise we wouldn't finish with data collection and data entry." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

Activity 1. Community Census – data collection and data entry

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

"The social assistants who delayed inputting the data understood they must first collect data and only thereafter input them." (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"The social assistants who finished inputting the questionnaires or input most of them organized very well their fieldwork (for instance, two villages a month, and in parallel they input data, set up meetings with CCS and also had training courses for parental education) ." (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"The analytical reports (we will draw up) after inputting all questionnaires into the database." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

Difficulties in conducting the activity 1

➢ Large distances to be covered.

➢ Large number of households.

➢ Lack of transportation facilities.

➢ Social worker is not a member of the community

➢ Social worker has not been supported by the mayoralty.

➢ The social worker employed in the project has taken over all the responsibility for social assistance activities in the commune.
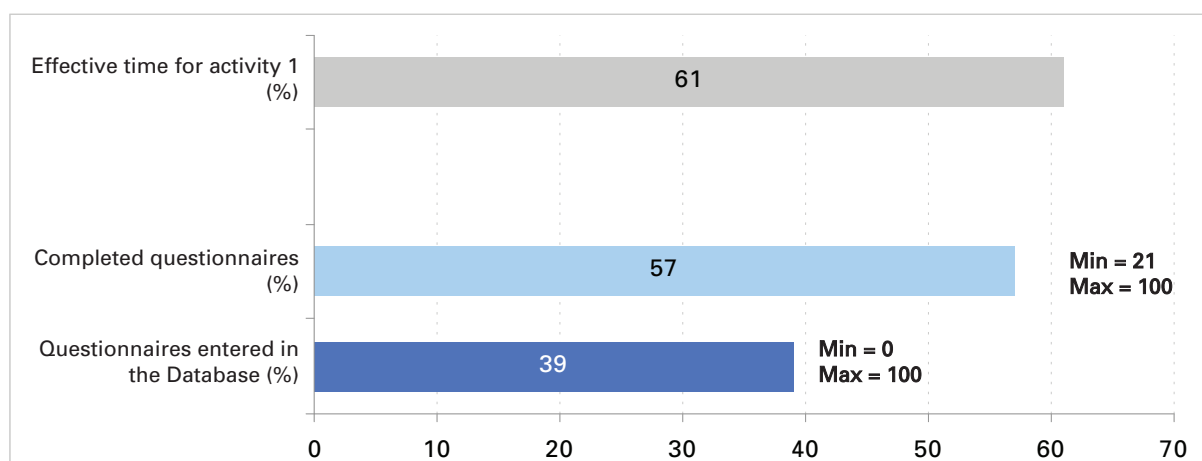

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

Questions asked in the focus groups with social workers

Has the community census been useful for identifying new cases of vulnerable children?

How many new cases of vulnerable children have you identified in your commune?

The main difficulties related to activity 1, according to social workers

	FG BT	FG VS	FG BC	FG VN
Large distances to travel			X	X
Large number of households			X	X
Lack of transportation means				
Social assistant is not from the community				
Social assistant didn't have town hall support				
Social assistant employed in the project took over the entire social work in the commune				X
Problems with the database			X	
Refusal of the households to answer the questions	X	X	X	
Project not supported by the local actors		X		
Respondents were difficult to contact during the agricultural season		X		
After filling in the questionnaires people expect receiving something which to improve their situation	X			

Notes: FG BT – focus group Botoșani, FG VS - focus group Vaslui, FG BC – focus group Bacău, FG VN - focus group Vrancea.

"As we were applying questionnaires we could see the seriousness and the amplitude of the problems in the field. We can also see the quantitative value of the problems, of the vulnerable cases (percentages, figures etc.)." (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

Most people were open speaking (80-90% of them). *"70% - I have two villages: one is of true Roma, the other with mongrels so to say," lingurari". There are more problems there than in the other villages. The rest are Romanian, rather aged population, few children and all worrying for tomorrow. They all mention money, food and heating."* (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

Did you have more problems with the Roma villages? – *"I was alone in the first day and there have been problems. The next day I went to the mayor and he gave me a community mediator who came with me. As long as I was with the community mediator all doors opened. (...) It is important to have somebody from the community, because they behave differently they answer differently your questions."* (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"I had a community policeman with me. It is an isolated village, you have to go 12 km through woodland; when it rains you can only go by foot or with a cart, it is mud. The school they have is for grades 1-4. Not all the children graduating the fourth grade go on learning. Otherwise there were no problems. Only that everybody was asking us what are we giving them, when are we giving them, some even came to the town hall." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

"Even though I was from the community... the people know me... I worked for 2 years at the town hall, with social assistance, and they still were reticent. Because they didn't know what the project was about... even if you explain them why I came... what do you want from me? They want a solution... Yes. I mean I give you my personal data, but what's in for me? They expect automatically to do something for them. The moment you ask them do you have children, or you stress on a disability or something, automatically... how will you help me if I have a sick child or with handicap of the first or second degree [...] But we could not promise them anything, I couldn't say that it will be done or... What we could say is that projects can be done in the future and try to make them understand they might be helped somehow." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

"At least they were asking me if it is compulsory to answer the questionnaire and I naturally said it is not compulsory. If it was not compulsory, he went away and didn't answer. Therefore you had refusals? Yes I had. A lot." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

Activity 2. Cooperation with local and county stakeholders for identifying cases of most vulnerable children and their families
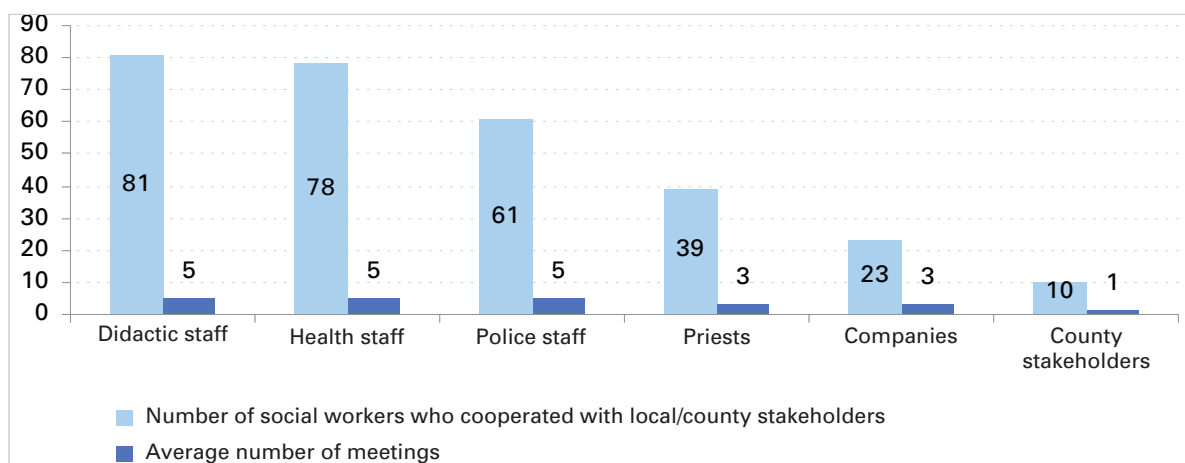
Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

Questions asked in the focus groups with social workers

With what local actor you have had the best cooperation for identifying vulnerable children?

The best cooperation, according to social workers

	FG BT	FG VS	FG BC	FG VN
Didactic staff	X		X	
Health staff	X			X
Police staff	X	X	X	X

Notes: FG BT – focus group Botoșani, FG VS - focus group Vaslui, FG BC – focus group Bacău, FG VN - focus group Vrancea. Priests, companies/ entrepreneurs and county stakeholders were not mentioned in any focus group.

Difficulties in conducting activity 2

➢ Refusals and difficulties in the collaboration with local stakeholders.
➢ Obstacles related to the status of social worker employed in the project as external or internal mayoralty.
➢ No solutions have been identified, no concrete interventions for the identified cases of vulnerable children.

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

The main difficulties related to activity 2, according to social workers

	FG BT	FG VS	FG BC	FG VN
Refusals from the local actors			X	X
Status of the social worker employed in the project as external to the mayoralty	X	X		X
No solutions have been identified, no concrete actions were taken		X		X

Notes: FG BT – focus group Botoșani, FG VS - focus group Vaslui, FG BC – focus group Bacău, FG VN - focus group Vrancea.

"People from the town hall were very helpful, the mayor, the colleagues, the other social workers. When I went in the field always someone was accompanying. Even the mayor came with me as some people are hard and reluctant. I was told by the lady hired as social assistant in the mayoralty that once she was chased. So is better to be with the mayor or with a policeman." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

The social assistant from the project tends to solve everything by himself! It is extraordinary, but not sustainable. "It is difficult to change the mentality of a commune priest, of a deputy mayor who lived in the communist period or of a policeman who became policeman just… the local actors were saying in a CCS meeting, in the case of a girl raped by her father, that the girl was a bump. I didn't give up and I succeeded! Now they are getting involved net to me." (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"The local actors put the problem as follows: what is in for us?" (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"For instance, I have some children which their mother abandoned… they lived in a placement centre somewhere in Brasov… They were reintegrated in the family somehow… their mother turned back from Italy and took them back. One of the children… I understand him, where he grew up, in a placement centre, he learned to… defend and to… I can understand him. But in the school he was treated… see, if you are insolent you are not welcomed in the school. Even the school principal, also had this attitude, that he has nothing to do in that school if he is insolent and if he doesn't stay put in the desk. This is no attitude to welcome a child who us trying to reintegrate in a family. I was shocked about how the people from the school talked to him and how they talked to his mother. All what I can do is complain to the mayor… maybe he will talk to… I don't know another way. They are passing them as if they were some balls. And they are running away from the children who repeated a grade… all the teachers, as if they were I don't k now what. They don't want any child who repeated a grade in their classroom, whom they cannot teach or control. I didn't imagine things can be this way." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

"In my commune, Albești, there is a project for school dropout and very many teachers got involved… We hope to remediate school dropout." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

The status problems of the social assistant employed by the project are mainly due to the tensed relations or to the collaboration with the social assistant from the town hall; they are not due to the relations with the other employees of the town hall or with other local actors. (Focus Group Botoșani)

"Neither them, as local actors, don't believe in the results… that there will actually be results. If I don't think there will be a change, it is perfectly clear I am not going to do anything. I am saying… if this one has been drinking ever since I knew him, it is clear that he will keep drinking. […] They must understand that a problem can be solved little by little. If you start by saying that it can't be done, you have no way." (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

Activity 3. Contributions to the functioning of the Community Consultative Structure (CCS). Ensuring technical secretariat for CCS meetings
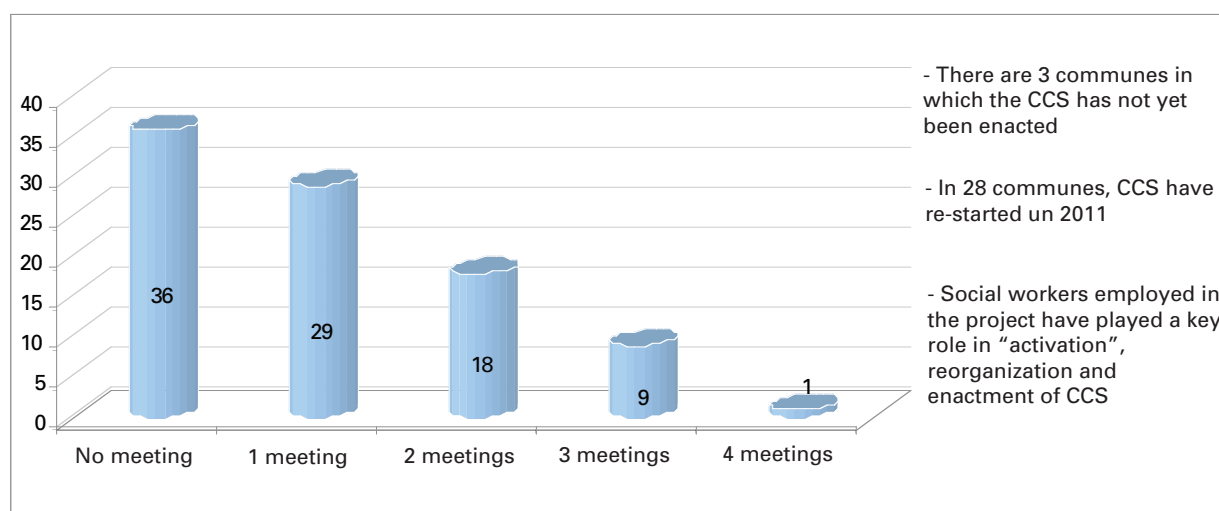
- There are 3 communes in which the CCS has not yet been enacted

- In 28 communes, CCS have re-started un 2011

- Social workers employed in the project have played a key role in "activation", reorganization and enactment of CCS

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

Questions asked in the focus groups with social workers

Are social workers ensuring the technical secretariat for CCS meetings?

Have the CCS been useful in solving the identified cases?

The main difficulties related to activity 3, according to social workers

	FG BT	FG VS	FG BC	FG VN
Total number of participants to the FG	9	8	8	6
Number of CCS meetings in your commune	1-2	1-4	1-2	1-4
The social worker employed in the project has done the secretarial work for CCS	7	3	7	4
CCS was active in solving some identified cases	2	2	4	4

Notes: FG BT – focus group Botoșani, FG VS - focus group Vaslui, FG BC – focus group Bacău, FG VN - focus group Vrancea.

"CCS consisted of people from the town hall and this was of no help at all. I gave up a few of them and I brought in from the community: a counselor for Roma problems who was of great help and who was warning me every time a problem appeared… he was coming with solutions to solve these problems; I also introduced de doctor in the CCS because I needed him and he was not part of the structure… I took off the secretary because he was of no help at all… the priest also helped me… I kept them some 10-15 minutes after the council meeting to discuss our problems too." (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"If we leave the town hall, the meetings… the CCS will never meet. In the communes where they have a longer history they will keep going on. But for instance, in my commune, if I go away they will certainly not meet again. They are now forced functioning. Yes, we impose on them… let's do this, let's see and do it. But if nobody pushes them from the back, nothing is done. It took a long until I… let's do this… yes, until I got them together. One is in holiday, the other has not time today, another has I don't know what problems." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

"It's difficult to bring the CCS together. People are not motivated. They would expect a fee or something as they receive for the Local Council meetings. It is much better to go directly to the mayor. You convince him and the job is done. The mayor is the main actor." (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"Only at the first (CCS) meeting they came all members. Afterwards it was impossible to bring them all together. So, the whole responsibility is mine." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

"In our commune the CCS consists of the mayor, the secretary, the head of the police station… We should need some simple people. And we cannot propose to bring in other people. Yes, this is the problem… you can't do anything at all. Yes, you cannot go past this, no matter how understanding the town people would be. I don't know why they… they all go by a template. They have their people and… They are like stones… You cannot go only by the template… yes, the policeman should be in, the doctor too. And why? Because practically they are not there, you don't feel their presence […] There can be some simple people who really give something, they are opened and they can do something. Because this is the key… you have to want to do something; if you want to do something, then you can do it, otherwise..." (Social worker, Focus Group Botoșani)

The identified cases were discussed directly with the mayor or in CCS meetings. Concrete interventions were only few and on individual cases (construction materials for a house, making a file for disability, ID for the children). No "strategies" are discussed for the problems affecting the largest number of children (decreasing school dropout, parental counseling for cases of neglect etc.). When there were interventions, it usually was the town hall doing something, not CCS members. (Conclusions Focus Group Botoșani)

Activity 4. Analysis of the available information and elaboration of reports presenting the risks indentified at community level and potential solutions

In all 96 communes included in the project

➢ There are drafted **only 3 introductory parts** of the analysis reports.

➢ There is **only 1 report** underlining the necessity of modifying a Local Council Decision on the Law 416 of minimum guaranteed income so that more families to be entitled for this benefit – concluded with approval of a Decision supporting the poor families.

➢ There is **only 1 mini-project** including the development of three courses of parental education.

➢ There is **only 1 project in course of completion**, regarding starting up handicraft workshops for people with disabilities.

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

Questions asked in the focus groups with social workers

Do you have now a better idea on the needs of children from your commune?

Do you have any idea about the projects necessary in your commune?

"We are afraid of this (community) report, we don't know how to do it, we will surely call [the supervisor] for help." (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"We have first to learn how to do it. Now I look at the database as a turkey looks at woods." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

"Sincerely, I do not know the meaning of session of parental education, let alone to organize it." (Social worker, Focus Group Vrancea)

"It was all right until now. But the analytical report, we cannot do it." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

"In the next meeting, I said I will first finish the database and the report which I can show the council… I also thought to make a project and show it to the local council, to be passed and ask for funds from the budget for the next year, because we need specialists, psychologists…; every couple getting married can benefit of parental counseling, sexual counseling…" (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"We have a lot of Roma population singing, fiddlers, they have their own instruments, but they are singing by the ear. I was thinking to gather them at the house of culture, arrange same hall where they can study, because there are some playing by notes and they might also teach the others, and the children… they may register in musical contests…" (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"Establishment of a day care centre for the children in the elementary grades. They are the first ones needing assistance with the homework, many could also use a hot meal…" (Social worker, Focus Group Vaslui)

"We talked to the mayor to build a house, a canteen for the children whose parents are working abroad. Get the children who have nothing to eat home… they are left with the grandparents who either drink a lot, or don't take care of the children." (Social worker, Focus Group Bacău)

Community projects to be proposed or already proposed by the social workers:

- A new chance for the children who repeated a grade and who finally dropped out of school, to go back and continue their studies.

- Social enterprises so that the parents have a job.

- Parent counseling so that they don't neglect their children.

- Making the mothers aware to go for health checks during the pregnancy.

- The counseling which the social assistants from the project may give, mainly, to inform the families about the papers required in order to benefit of social services, or to inform them that they can get different kinds of aids (handicap, social aid, complementary allocation).

Activity 6. Promoting the organization of support groups, sessions of parental education, counseling activities

> **In all 96 communes included in the project**
>
> ➢ Only 25 social workers employed in the project conducted information and counseling activities.
>
> ➢ In only one commune, there were courses of parental education.
>
> ➢ In only one commune, a support group for children with poor school performances was organized.

Data: Supervisors' Reports for social workers' activities completed up to September 15, 2011.

> **Questions asked in the focus groups with social workers**
>
> In concrete terms, what involves the counseling activities for vulnerable persons?
>
> Why have you not organized support groups or sessions of parental education?
>
> In your opinion, this kind of activities would be useful in your commune?

In all four focus groups, only five participants have had some idea about these subjects. The majority emphasized the considerable need for training in this regard.

SECTION (II) Main obstacles and recommendations

The social workers who participated in focus groups were asked to answer in writing to the following two questions: (A) Which are the first 3 problems that represent obstacles for project implementation?; (B) Which are the main 3 issues that should be changed in the future? Their answers are presented below.

Number of social workers who participated in focus groups

	FG BT	FG VS	FG BC	FG VN	Total
Total number of participants	9	8	8	6	31 (100%)
Number of social workers who mentioned between 1 and 3 obstacles	7	6	8	4	25 (81%)
Number of social workers who provided between 1 and 3 recommendations	9	8	8	2	27 (87%)

(A) Main obstacles for project implementation (number)
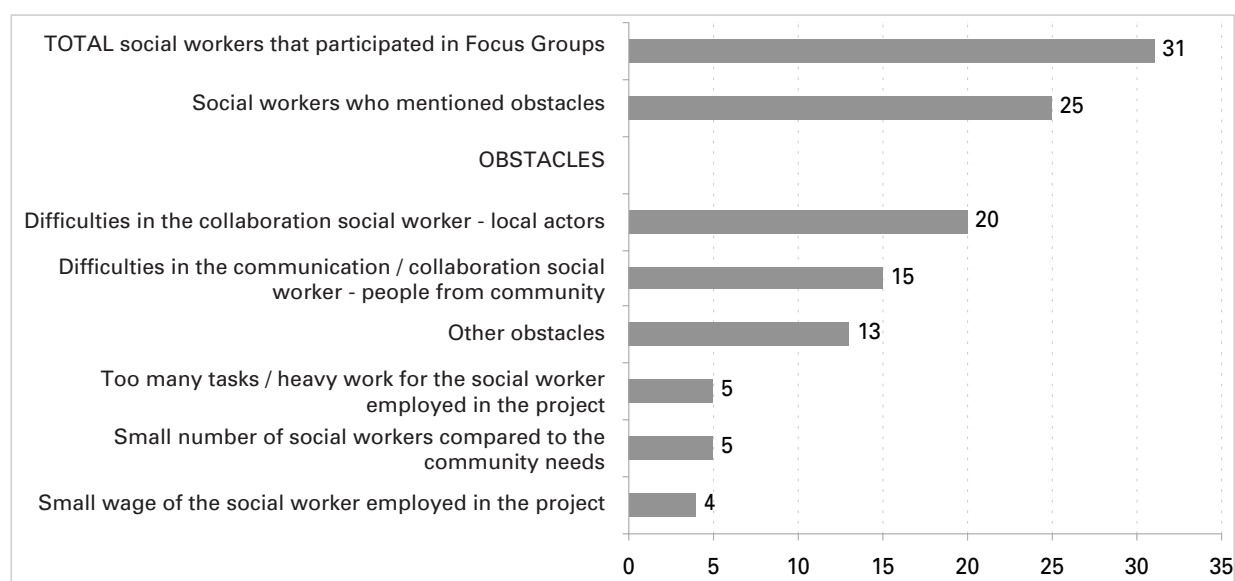
Data: Focus groups with social workers. A social worker could mention 1-to-3 obstacles. The category 'Others' includes various issues, which were mentioned by only 1-2 persons.

Difficulties in the collaboration social worker - local actors

'Mentality of the local actors about the project.'

'No communication with the mayoralty.'

'No communication between the local actors.'

'Lack of cooperation and communication with the social referent because he doesn't believe in the results of the project.'

'Lack of interest of the local actors towards the project.'

'Low support of the mayoralty for the project.'

'Non-involvement of the local actors.'

'The CCS members don't get involved in solving the cases of social assistance.'

'Gathering all CCS members, maybe by paying them.'

'The local actors don't know the major problems of the community.'

Difficulties in the communication/ collaboration social worker - people from community

'Refusal of people to answer the questionnaire.'

'Mentality of the vulnerable people and families that think that things cannot be changed for the better (they must want to be helped).'

'Reticence of the vulnerable people and their wrong perception about the solutions that might solve their problems.'

'The mentality of the identified persons was a problem when approaching them.'

'The community, including the vulnerable people, is not communicating with those from whom they might get support, counseling.'

'Community mentality regarding the involvement of the social worker in someone other's family.'

Data: Excerpts from focus groups with social workers.

(B) Recommendations - Main issues that should be changed in the future (number)
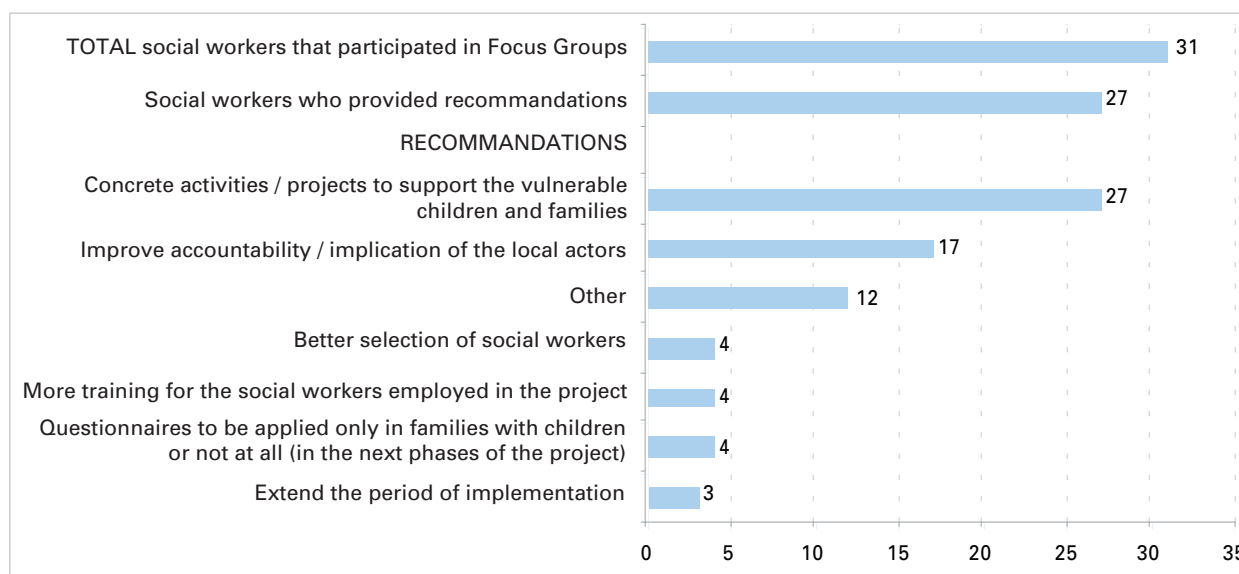
Data: Focus groups with social workers. A social worker could mention 1-to-3 recommendations. The category 'Others' includes various issues, which were mentioned by only 1-2 persons.

Concrete activities/ projects to support the vulnerable children and families

'Develop concrete activities for the vulnerable children.'

'Draw in new projects of social services.'

'Involvement of the local authorities in the social problems of the community and access funds for projects.'

'Actions for preventing the risk situations, such as offer jobs to the parents, day care centers and kindergartens with long working hours for children from vulnerable families, parental education.'

'Monthly meetings in schools with the parents for debating the problems of children from that school.'

'Formation actions and sessions for the parents, particularly for pregnant mothers.'

'Information campaign regarding the risks of school dropout, of alcohol addiction, etc.'

'Permanent counseling of parents from disorganized families.'

'Food aids for the vulnerable families.'

'Organizing voluntary groups to aid the people in need.'

Improve accountability/ implication of the local actors

'Replace CCS members with people having initiative and a real desire to help other people.'

'Cooperation of the CCS members and making them aware of their role; reorganization to bring in involved and available people.'
'More active collaboration between school, mayoralty and community.'

'Change the mentality of local actors regarding the intervention at the local level.'

'Continue the CCS activity after the project ends, not just on the paper.'

'Better collaboration among CCS members.'

'Closer collaboration between social worker and the local actors.'

'More attention of the local authorities for the work of social workers.'

Data: Excerpts from focus groups with social workers.

7.4 Community case studies

Distribution of community case studies

	Commune	Period	Method	Interviews with local stakeholders	
				Community representatives	Households with 'invisible' children
Botoşani	Vorona	31 oct. – 3 noi.	Studiu de caz	7	4
Neamţ	Români	3 – 5 noiembrie	Studiu de caz	6	3
Vrancea	Jariştea	1 noiembrie	Vizită în comunitate	3	3
Buzău	Calvini	11 noiembrie	Vizită în comunitate	2	2

Case study: Vorona, Botoşani County

General presentation: Located in the south-western part of Botoşani County, 20 km away from the county municipality, Vorona commune consists of six villages; it spreads on an area of 8,205 hectares and has 8,202 inhabitants in 2,755 households.

The basic economic activities consist in plant crops and animal rearing; the inhabitants of Vorona commune are engaged mainly in subsistence agriculture. The main firms which operate in the commune are family associations or companies engaged in trading, food industry, bakery and wood processing.

Period of the case study: 31 October – 3 November

Interviews: 7 interviews with the local stakeholders: mayor, deputy mayor, mayoralty secretary, social assistant from the mayoralty, teachers, priest, social assistant employed in the project.

Cases identified during the project: A total of 15 vulnerable families were identified during the project „Helping the Invisible Children", with a total of 57 children in risk situations. None of these cases has been solved, 3 currently being in process of solving.

The main problems confronting the vulnerable children from Vorona are:

- Poverty, improper dwelling conditions, very large households with many children

- Neglect and abuse

- Not attending school, suspicions of school dropout

- No identification papers

- Parents going abroad to work

The team project visited 4 such families, cases which cover a large pallet of problems including poverty, many children in the family, risk of abandonment, school dropout, neglect, lack of identification papers, and psychic problems.

Perspective of the local stakeholders

Relevance

All local stakeholders agree that there is very much need for social assistance in Vorona and that such project is more than necessary. Even if most of the cases were already known in the community before the project started, their reinsertion on the agenda of the authorities took them one step closer to solving.

Effectiveness

The local stakeholders, most of them CCS members, know about the running project. Although no CCS meeting has been held since the start of the project, the social assistant employed in the project discussed individually with the stakeholders that might intervene to solve the various problems. However, the general perception of the local stakeholders is that the main activity of the project is to identify the cases of children in risk situations; none of the interviewed people focused on finding solutions to the identified situations.

Sustainability

The local stakeholders from Vorona consider that if the mayoralty would have funds and it would be legally possible, most probably, the social assistant employed in the project would remain to work for the mayoralty after UNICEF funding ceases. Although the need for social intervention is known, mobilization is rather low in the mayoralty. None of the local stakeholder took the initiative to solve even a single case.

Vorona - Case study I

Vulnerability: school dropout, poverty

Family overview: Large family (parents and 8 minor children), with no other incomes than the allocations for children.

> You only have income from the allocations? – *Yes, only this.* – And you also work by the day? – *Yes, until now I used to work by the day, but now where can I go? Night time maybe. The crops from the field are harvested, the...* – Now it's winter time, where can you, and do what? – Can't you file for social assistance? – *Yes, I can, but I need to work for them for a period, and if I need to go somewhere with some work… I must work 2 weeks, maybe more, 3 weeks, and what do they give me? What they pay me… I pay the... but it is not enough. Well, and if I go to work for them, I need to take food with me, because I stay there from morning till evening, where they ask me to work… And what? No... I give up. Don't give me warmth, what they don't give me. Don't have a choice. We live from the allocations. It is good that we have children and we live on the allocations. When I was working on the construction site I had a wage, I had a wage because I was working. When the children will grow up, I don't know what we will do.*

Situation of the children: The family has 12 children, of which 8 are still at home.
They are:

- A girl of 17 who dropped school after just two grades

> „…because the teacher was standing by me and he told me: Marieta, this is not possible. You must go with them to a special school... Where… I was supposed to take them to Dorohoi. But I was so worried, with a lot of children, all of them small children. Go to… no money... from the little allocation, the electric power... but I also need to buy oil, sugar, salt, matches for the house, I need them all. And I didn't let her go to school. 2 grades."

- A boy of 15 who went to school just for 5 grades

> „The other boy, with whom I had problems, I also kept him home. Because they had him repeat the grade because he was fighting, he was making problems. And I said… why should he make problems? He should better stay home. He is watched by us and he is very industrious at home, he is doing a good job. We have a horse, a cart and… Why should I let him go to school, if he was in the fifth grade for three years? I let him… and the grandfather is... The grandfather…does…school. – Did you talk to the teachers in the years when he had to repeat the grades? – Yes, they told me that it is because... this year they didn't let him pass the grade because he was impertinent and they put him a bad mark for behaviour. Because of the low mark for behaviour they didn't let him pass the grade."

- Three girls in the elementary school, grades V, II and I, who are going to school

- A boy of 5 who should go to the kindergarten, but he doesn't want to go there anymore since his sister is no longer going (she is in the first grade at school)

- A boy of 2 who is too small for the kindergarten

- A little girl of 1 year

Vorona - Case study II

Vulnerability: poverty, risk of school dropout

Family overview: Large family living in poverty (parents with 6 minor children), with no other income than the allocations for the children; they all live in one room, with no power supply.

> *„I even went to Botoșani and I asked. And they told me that with less than 60 million they can't put a pole there. They told me, just come with 60 million and in two days you are connected. Where from can I get 60 million?"*

Situation of the children: Of the six children, 5 go to school: two in the first grade, one in the second grade, one in the third grade and one in the fifth grade. The youngest, aged 3, was taken to the kindergarten, but didn't fit in and was taken back home. According to the mother, she intends not to let the eldest daughter to school next year (she is in the fifth grade now).

> *„I thought that as of next year I don't want to let the eldest one to go to school. They ask a lot of things, many things they want. – In what grade is she now? – In the fifth. – Well, how so, you don't want to let her go to school? – Well, if it is hard? You need money; you need books and notebooks... She asked me now to buy her books. – Did you file a request for funds for school books? – No, because they said that if we have more than 20 acres of land they don't give us. And the horse, and the cart. And I said that all the money it takes to make that file, those papers, I better give that money to buy notebooks.*

The lack of electric power hinders the school activity of the children. They all do their homework on the same small table on which they also eat, taking turns. When the day is longer they all manage to do their homework. In winter they do their homework at candle light.

> *„They just came from school and I fed hem quickly so they can start writing. One on one side, the other on the other side... now that it still is light... afterwards it gets dark and they don't see anymore. So, two by two. The eldest one writes the last, because she is the fastest. Now, the day is still long. In winter it will be more difficult, because it gets dark quickly and they will write at candle light."*

Vorona - Case study III

Vulnerability: psychic problems, poverty

Family overview: Disorganized family. The parents are divorced – the father works by the day, he is addicted to alcohol – the mother lives with another man; she is currently aboard, working. The girl lives with her father and the younger brother.

Situation of the children: The girl has been diagnosed by a specialist from Botoşani with severe depression after several accesses of fury, which the father could no longer control. These episodes started when the mother left. She was under medical treatment until soon, when the father considered that she is well, so he decided to cut the treatment.

> *„Well, the doctor said that if she feels better she may not take the treatment. Anyhow, she was quite asleep when she was taking the pills. –* Did you go to the doctor before interrupting the pills? *– No, I didn't have the money. But she was feeling better."*

The girl is going to school, and she wants to go on to the high school. Because of the situation of her parents the girl is caught every day in activities inadequate to her age, such as cooking for father and younger brother, cleaning and maintaining it in the entire household.

> *„She is hardworking, she manages the household. She cooks and she cleans... she takes care of her brother, she also helps him with the homework... Food, well as much as she knows... fried eggs, potatoes."*

Although the girl is no longer on treatment she is in a visible state of apathy, sadness; she is much closed and completely non-communicative. She has no friends with who to play, she doesn't socialize at school. When we asked her about her playmates, her answer was direct „I don't have. I don't trust people".

Vorona - Case study IV

Vulnerability: no identification papers/ neglect

Family overview: Disorganized family – the parents lived as concubines – relation from which resulted 4 children: 3 boys and a girl. The mother is currently having another concubine and she takes care of the three boys. The girl lives with her father in a wreck of house. The father works by the day. The grandmother, who lives nearby takes care of the little girl when the father goes to work.

> *„–* Why didn't you make a birth certificate to the girl? *There are six years since then... – Well, I lived without IDs some four years until I went to get one. And I didn't have the money... I needed to go to Botoşani. Where from the money? Now, after that lady was here, I said I would go and make her the ID, but I got sick and I was in the hospital, I came back last week. And he took the girl and said he will make her ID because he has money..."*

Situation of the children: Although the girl is 6 years old, she still doesn't have a birth certificate. Her situation is uncertain as she shuttles from the mother to the father and back, while the lack of communication between the parents makes it impossible the collaboration required in order to getting the papers. Each parent has his/her own version of the story, blaming the other. The common denominator in this problem is, however, the lack of money. As of this year the girl goes to the kindergarten been accepted by the educator, even if she has no ID.

Case study: Români, Neamţ County

General presentation: The commune Români from Neamţ County is located in the south of the county, near the border with Bacău County. The closest town is Buhuşi (from Bacău County), 12 kilometers away. The commune consists of three villages – Români, Siliştea and Go mani which cover an area of 5,390 ha. The commune of Români, according to the 2002 Census, has 4,655 inhabitants in 1,561 households.

The main economic activities in the commune are agriculture and animal rearing. Besides the trading firms operating in the commune, there also are 8 corn mills and one wheat mill, and two wood cutting shops.

Period of the case study: 3-5 November

Interviews: 6 interviews with the local stakeholders: mayor, mayoralty secretary, social assistant from the mayoralty, city manager, priest, social assistant employed in the project

Cases identified during the project: A total of 24 vulnerable families were identified during the project „Helping the Invisible Children", with a total of 59 children in risk situations. 56 cases are in progress of being solved, and 3 have already been solved.

The main problems confronting the vulnerable children from Români are:

- Poverty, improper dwelling conditions, very large households with many children

- Neglect and abuse

- Not attending school, suspicions of school dropout

- No identification papers

- Parents going abroad to work

- Serious diseases

The team project visited 3 such families, cases which cover problems such as poverty, large families, risk of school dropout, lack of identification papers, and disability.

Perspective of the local stakeholders

Relevance

The interviewed local stakeholders consider that the needs of Români commune fit very much the concept of the project proposed by UNICEF. The review of all commune households facilitated, according to their statements, a better knowledge of the community and of the problems confronting it.

Effectiveness

The local stakeholders, most of them CCS members, know of the progress of the project. CCS, as structure, is functional from the start of the project; just one meeting took place so far. Although there have been some internal conflicts within the CCS, the direct involvement of the mayor and of some other local stakeholders, facilitated the fast solution of the serious problems of the community without summoning the CCS.

Sustainability

The local stakeholders from Români consider that it is good to maintain the social assistant employed in the project. She has a good knowledge of the community and can relate easily with the people in difficulty. The very good collaboration between the social assistant and the mayor result in the immediate solving of most cases of children in vulnerable situations.

Români – Case study I

Vulnerability: Risk of school dropout, poverty

Family overview: Poor single parent family. The mother, divorced, has no other income besides the state allocation for the two children and the income from working by the day.

> „I work by the day, here and there, so I can support them. What can I do with just the allocation? – Don't you receive anything from the mayoralty? – I did the heating, just that. I didn't pay tax, because I have no money to pay. I am living here because my mother's parent gave it to me for charity. I didn't have a place to live. My parents are old, and sick, they can't help me"

> – Don't you fit in for the social aid? – Didn't apply. It is not worthy. It is of no benefit. Instead of going to work for the mayoralty all those hours, I better go and work by the day for the people, and they also give me something extra, a potato, beans, so I have something to eat. Otherwise I take the money from them… 70 thousands a kilo of oil. Doesn't last one week… and you have to make documents. You go to Piatra, go to Roman. I hardly left the village, so I don't think I can manage, so that...

Situation of the children: Both children are at school, one on the first grade and one in the sixth grade. The activity of the social assistant employed in the project was felt in this case by his insistency with the mother that the boy is reenlisted at school (he didn't pass one grade).

> - How many children do you have? – Two, one in the first grade and one in the sixth grade. With this one in the sixth grade it is more difficult... – Why? – He didn't pass one year... – And didn't you reenlist him? – Yes, I did. When Mrs. Carmen came to me with those papers, I talked to her... I told her and she said, let him go, it may be better."

Români – Case study II

Vulnerability: Sick child with locomotive disability and risk of school dropout

Family overview: Family with medium income, with two children. Only the father works, the mother stays home and looks after the two years-old boy and of the boy with disability.

Situation of the children: The boy had a brain tumor for which he underwent surgery at Iași, unsuccessful, causing paralysis. The boy's current doctor is in Cluj at this moment. Each month, the boy goes to Cluj for therapy, either with his father, or with one of the grandparents.

The boy is currently in Cluj for recovery after a second brain surgery. The parents pay for all these treatments and travels, but they don't have the money to take the boy to school every day; following this project, the mayor and the social assistant send every day the school bus to take the boy to school and back home, despite the divergences with the school principal who does not agree.

> „The school principal didn't agree that the bus goes every day to take him to school too. She says this is not her problem, or the problem of the community, it is our problem. The distance is large, he is in a wheelchair, there is no other way. And he likes at school, the children help him, take care of him. He is learning well. But, this is wickedness. Nothing else. Lucky with the mayor. Anyhow, it didn't happen even once, to pass by, see him and not to bring him home..."

Români – Case study III

Vulnerability: No identification papers, school dropout

Family overview: Large family, no incomes, parents working by the day. The little children and the household choirs are left in the care of the eldest daughter, aged 16, who gave up school. The whole family, comprising 8 people, live in just one room.

Situation of the children: One of the children, the eldest, has no IDs, although he is 17 years.

> „*My brother delayed the IDs. He is 17. Didn't have the money.* – Well, in three years, didn't anybody ask him the ID, ever? – *No, didn't need it.*"

The social assistant employed in the project discovered this case on occasion of the census, when she asked for the papers. After the census, the boy was taken to Roman by the commune mayor in his own car, to make him IDs.

Both elder children gave up school after finishing 8 grades. The boy is 17 and works by the day in the village, and the girl is 16 and looks after the household and the rest of her brothers.

> – And what do you do? Why didn't you go to the high school? – *Didn't have the money...* – Did you hear of school grants for the high school? *Do you want to work, what do you want to do? – I want, but I don't have where. In our village, we worked by the day, but not much, because everybody is out and I need to take care of the little ones.*"

7.5   Opinion Survey of community representatives

7.5.1 Main results

Period of data collection: October 28 – November 7, 2011

Number of questionnaires: 167 completed with community representatives

Table A5. 1 Distribution of respondents by county and type of commune (number)

	Communes with reported cases of vulnerable children		Communes with NO REPORTED cases of vulnerable children		Total
	Underdeveloped	Developed	Underdeveloped	Developed	
Bacău	4	0	8	8	20
Botoşani	12	8	0	0	20
Buzău	4	0	8	8	20
Iaşi	8	8	4	4	24
Neamţ	4	4	4	4	16
Suceava	6	9	8	4	27
Vaslui	12	0	12	0	24
Vrancea	4	12	0	0	16
Total	**54**	**41**	**44**	**28**	**167**

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011.

The opinions of community representatives regarding all questions included in the questionnaire are presented in Annex 7.5.2. This annex highlights only the topics that are characterized by significant differences of opinions as well as the main community aspects that are associated with these variations.

Four variables at the community level prove to explain most of the variation of the individual opinions of the community representatives: (1) county, (2) community type – underdeveloped or developed, according to the initial selection of communes to be included in the project, (3) position of the social worker employed in the project as internal or external to the mayoralty (see table A 5.2), (4) category of local stakeholders grouped into: decision-makers (mayor, vice mayor, mayoralty secretary) and other local actors (teachings staff, medical staff, mediators, priest, economic agent, policeman, social worker not employed in the project).

The analysis included also two variables at the individual level: (1) gender and (2) whether the respondent is or not a member of the Consultative Community Structure.

The distribution of sample by the key variables is shown in table A 5.2.

Table A5. 2 Distribution of respondents by the key variables

	Număr	%
TOTAL of which:	**167**	**100**
Community type		
Underdeveloped	98	58,7
Developed	69	41,3
Position of the social worker employed in the project		
External to the mayoralty	115	68,9
Internal to the mayoralty	52	31,1
Respondent's gender		
Man	97	58,1
Woman	70	41,9
Respondent's position with the CCS		
CCS member	102	61,1
Non CCS member	60	35,9
Category of local stakeholder		
Decision-makers of which:	68	40,7
- Mayor	22	13,2
- Vice mayor	19	11,4
- Mayoralty secretary	27	16,2
Other local stakeholders of which:	99	59,3
- Teaching staff, school mediator	18	10,8
- Medical staff, medical mediator	21	12,6
- Priest/ economic agent / Roma mediator	18	10,8
- Police agent	17	10,2
- Social worker/ referent (not involved in the project)	25	15,0

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. Regarding the position with the CCS, 5 (3%) cases are missing.

The position of the social worker as internal or external to the mayoralty is a highly significant variable. The communities which have an internal social worker engaged in the project tend to be better informed regarding the project and to have a better collaboration between the local institutional actors.

Level of knowledge about the project

In nearly all communes the population was informed about the project, mostly as a result of the community census.

The level of knowledge about the project among the local stakeholders is very high, 94.6% of the respondents know that the project runs in their commune. 78% of them (86% of valid responses) know 'many' or 'very many' things about the project. The information most well-known include: (1) objectives – 'identification and assistance of the poor children and families', (2) UNICEF and (3) the employment of a 'new' social worker.

The level of knowledge about the project differs significantly with the county. Thus, the respondents from Vaslui County have the largest volume of information about the project, while those from Vrancea have the lowest.

The community development level does not make a significant difference regarding the community representatives' level of knowledge about the project. Neither the respondent's gender nor the category of stakeholders makes a significant difference with regard to the knowledge level. All types of stakeholders, be it decision-makers or others, men and women, have approximately the same volume of information about the project.

The local actors from communes with internal social worker have a significantly higher volume of information about the project compared to the communes with external social worker (with an average value of 3.5 compared to 3.0, on a scale from 1- 'very little' to 4 – 'very much' information about the project). Thus, dissemination of information about the project is favored by a position internal to the mayoralty of the social worker employed in the project.

Figure A5. 1 How much do you know about this project?
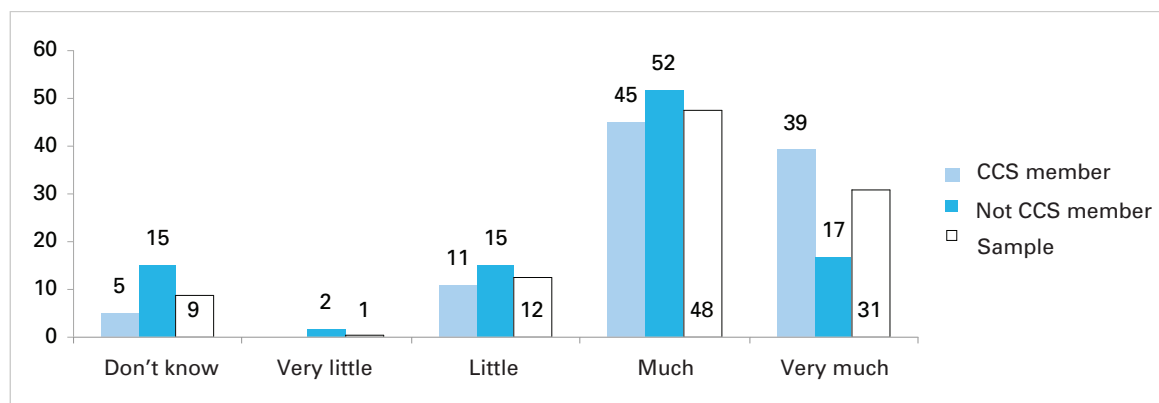
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The members of Community Consultative Structure (CCS) tend to appreciate their volume of information as 'very much', which is significantly higher compared with the local stakeholders that do not participate into CCS (figure A 5.1).

Community needs for social assistance

Nearly all (96.4%) community representatives declare that there is a high need for social assistance services in their community. The needs for social assistance are perceived as being significantly higher in Botoşani, Vaslui or Neamţ, particularly by comparison with Suceava and Buzău. However, the high needs for developing social services at the local level is a matter of consensus and does not differentiate between poor and developed communes, decision-makers and other local actors, men and women.

Small but significant differences are registered according to the position of the social worker in relation to the mayoralty and the respondent's position with the CSS. Thus, the needs for social assistance are perceived more intense in communities with internal social workers and by the respondents who are CCS members.

Community problems affecting the children

According to the community representatives, the main three phenomena/processes which affect adversely the situation of the local children are the lack of jobs for parents, the high level of poverty and the migration of parents for working abroad (figure A 5.2).

Figure A5. 2 Which are the phenomena/processes which affect adversely the situation of the children in your community? (% sample)
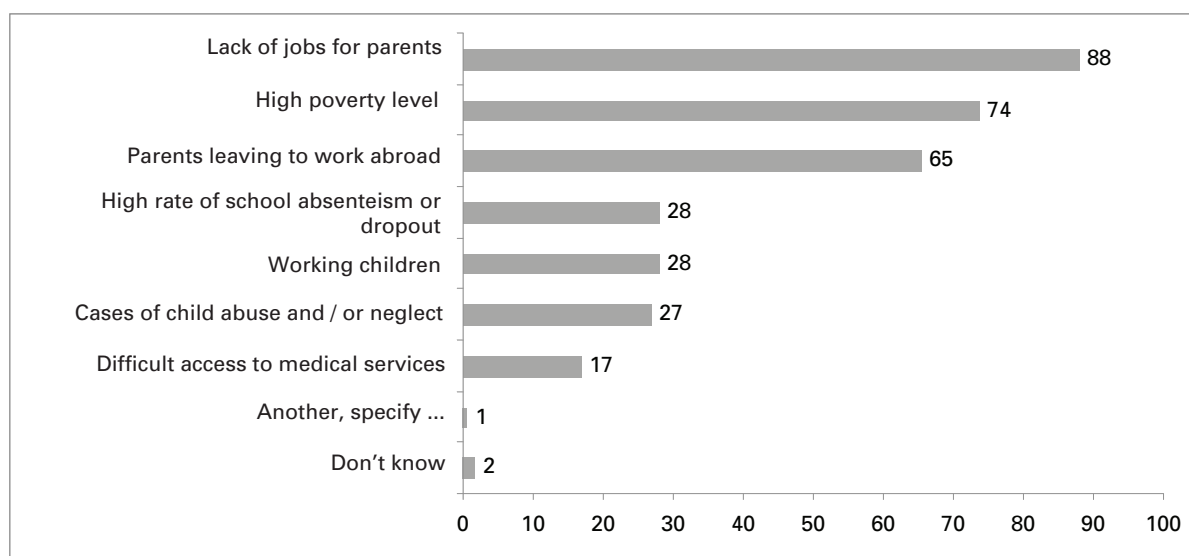
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167. The sum of percentages is larger than 100% because one commune may be affected by more than one phenomena/ process.

The profiles of counties by community problems affecting the children differ significantly (table A 5.3). While in Iaşi and Buzău all respondents select the lack of jobs for parents as the main problem for the children's well-being, in Neamţ only 50% of respondents think the same.

112

Table A5. 3 Profile of counties by community problems affecting the children (% county/ sample)

Community problems	County								Sample
	BC	BT	BZ	IS	NT	SV	VS	VN	
Lack of jobs for parents	90	95	100	100	50	85	92	81	**88**
High poverty level	85	45	85	63	81	59	92	88	**74**
Parents leaving abroad to work	80	90	35	79	63	52	67	56	**65**
Working children	10	20	0	33	38	30	42	56	**28**
High school absenteeism or dropout	20	30	25	25	50	30	29	19	**28**
Child abuse and/or neglect	15	25	10	38	50	19	38	25	**27**
Difficult access to medical services	5	20	15	33	6	15	13	25	**17**

Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167. The sum of percentages by column is larger than 100% because one commune may be affected by more than one phenomena/ process. Marked cells indicate significantly higher values.

The high poverty level is mentioned by most respondents, in most counties, but by only 45% in Botoșani. So, although Botoșani has a very high poverty rate, the problems of children are not mainly caused of poverty but by the contraction of the labour market and the high migration for work abroad. Actually, the high poverty rate is associated with the prevalence of subsistence agriculture hence 'children have some food to eat'. Nonetheless, most households have no source of cash income precisely because they do not find paid jobs. Leaving abroad for work is the only available alternative, wherefrom a high number of children are left behind with no parental supervision.

Child labour is of special concern particularly in Vaslui and Vrancea. High absenteeism and school dropout are highlighted in Neamț. Child abuse and/or neglect are seen as a major problem in Neamț, Iași and Vaslui.

Besides county, other two key variables are also relevant. The high level of poverty is significantly more frequently mentioned in the underdeveloped communes – 83% of respondents compared with 61% in the developed ones. Expectedly, the teaching[56] staff and the school mediators consider the high rate of absenteeism and school dropout as a main problem at a significant larger extent than the other local stakeholders (61% versus 28% at the sample level).

Performance of the local institutions in protecting the children, before the project

Nearly all stakeholders assess the performance of the local institutions, be it mayoralty, school, church, dispensary/ family doctor or police, as 'good' or 'very good' in protecting the children. This is rather a desirability effect – institutional representatives who evaluate their own institutions. Actually, the focus group discussions and interviews revealed many disfunctionalities such as discriminatory attitudes in schools, incompetent or indifferent family doctors, priests that do 'everything for money, nothing for free', and a rather generalized lack of inter-institutional cooperation.

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[56] Nearly all are women.

Figure A5. 3 Perceived performance of local institutions in protecting children
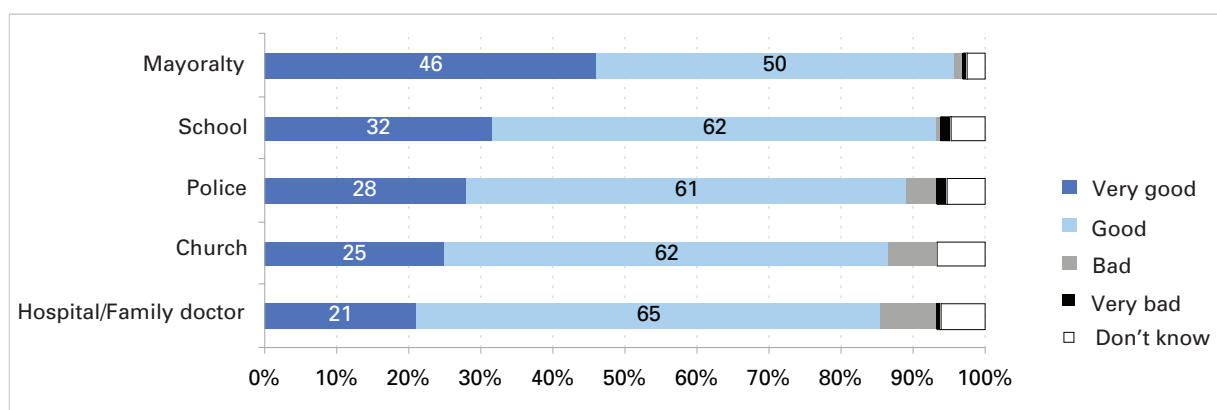
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The opinions vary significantly across counties,[57] but only in relation to mayoralty, school and church. Thus, in the community representatives' view, mayoralties from Neamț are significantly less efficient in protecting the children than those from all the other counties, in particular Bacău and Botoșani.[58] Schools also have significantly less performance in Neamț, especially compared with Bacău.[59] Church plays a significantly more important role in Bacău than in all other counties, particularly Botoșani and Iași.[60]

Informing about the project

The vast majority of respondents confirm that a process of information took place in their community about the start and unfolding of the project (figure A 5.4A). In most communes, information was done through various methods and targeted more stakeholders, including children, institutional actors, CCS and population (figure A 5.4B). For informing the population, posters and public meetings were organized. However, **the most effective way of informing the general population was the community census applied for identifying the 'invisible' children.**

The process of information did not constitute a specific activity of the project. It was organized by more communes in some counties than in the other. Only 70% of the community representatives from Iași confirm the existence of an informing process at the commune level, whereas in the other counties the corresponding shares are larger than 85%. The developed communes have been more active in organizing an informing process than the underdeveloped ones. The other key variables are not relevant in this respect.

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[57] The other key variables are not relevant with respect to the perceived performance of the local institutions.
[58] Average value of 2.7 for Neamț compared with 3.9 in Bacău and Botoșani, and 3.4 at the sample level, on a scale from 1- 'very bad' to 4 – 'very good'.
[59] Average value of 2.9 for Neamț compared with 3.7 in Bacău, and 3.3 at the sample level, on a scale from 1- 'very bad' to 4 – 'very good'.
[60] Average value of 3.6 for Bacău compared with 3.0 in Botoșani and Iași, and 3.2 at the sample level, on a scale from 1- 'very bad' to 4 – 'very good'.

Figure A5. 4 (A) Has there been in your community an information process regarding the start and development of the project 'Help the invisible children'? (B) How was information been done?
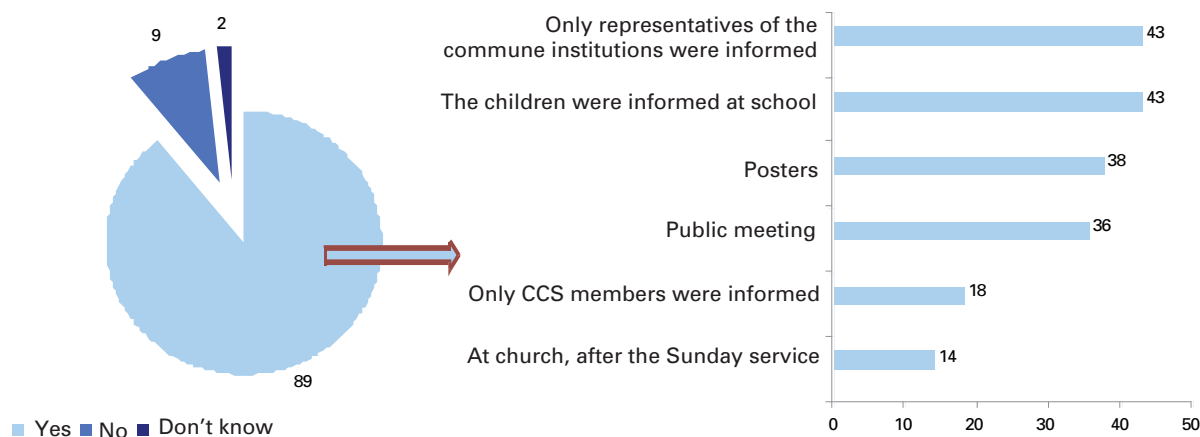
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. (A) N=167. (B) N=149. The sum of values is larger than 100% because the information may have been performed in more than one way.

Children were informed about the project at school in significantly more communes in Vaslui (87%) and Neamț (79%), in particular compared to Buzău (12%), Vrancea (13%) or Suceava (28%).

The CCS meetings

As regards the activity of the Community Consultative Structure (CCS), more than half of the local actors (59%)[61] say that the frequency of the CCS meetings has increased after the project started. The respondents who are members of this structure declare in a significant higher proportion that the frequency of meetings increased (figure A 5.5A).[62]

Figure A5. 5 (A) After the project started in your commune, did the frequency of CCS meetings? (B) Did you participate in meetings/ discussions with other local stakeholders with the view to identify/ evaluate/ solve some cases of vulnerable children?
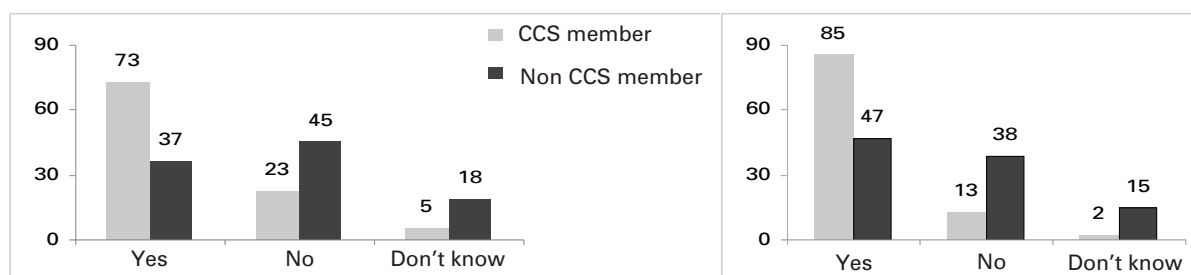
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

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[61] 31% answered 'no' and 10% did not respond.
[62] The other key variables are not relevant in this respect.

In the same time, the CCS members participated in a higher share to the meetings/discussions with other actors in order to identify/evaluate/solve some cases of 'invisible' children (figure A 5.5B). Nonetheless, also 47% of the non CCS members took part in such activities, in particular in the developed communes.

Interaction with 'invisible' children

Most of the stakeholders (76%) know cases of 'invisible' children identified during the project. The proportion varies significantly across counties from 53% of respondents in Buzău and 100% in Bacău. It is also much higher in the developed communes (86% of respondents *versus* 69% in the underdeveloped communes) and for the CCS members (86% versus 62% of non CCS members).

Comparing the number of vulnerable children identified in the project estimated by the local actors and that given by the social workers with the project, one may observe that in Vrancea the stakeholders underestimate this number, while in Neamț they overestimate it.

The mayoralty, as institution, is involved the most in solving the cases of vulnerable children identified during the project. Unlike the other local stakeholders, the mayors, mayoralty secretaries and the vice-mayors mentioned a higher percentage of cases which they know of, for which their employing institutions involved in problem-solving. Thus, the proportion[63] of cases for which the institution provided actual support declines from 85%, as the mayors declared, to 78%, according to the mayoralty secretaries, and to 66% respectively, in the case of vice-mayors, compared with 39% at the sample level.

Cases of 'invisible' children with limited access to services

About a third of respondents (34%) affirm that in their communities there are vulnerable children for whom it has not been yet possible to provide access to social services. The proportion of these respondents varies largely among counties, from 94% in Neamț to 60% in Botoșani, 20-33% in the other counties, and none in Bacău respectively. It is also higher in the developed communes (50% compared to 25% in the underdeveloped communes). Nevertheless, the data collected through the Synthetic Fiche show that this is only perception as the developed communes succeeded to solve a significantly larger share of cases than the underdeveloped ones.[64]

The factors which hinder the access of the 'invisible' children to social services pertain mainly to the lack of financial resources of institutions and population, the lack of human resources and the difficult collaboration with the members of the beneficiary families.

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[63] Proportion of cases that were provided support determined as percentage using the answers to the following questions: D51. 'How many cases of vulnerable children that were identified during the project do you know?' and D52. 'For how many cases of vulnerable children identified during the project, did your employing institution provide actual support to solve the problem?' Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=127.
[64] The other key variables are not relevant.

Figure A5. 6 Factors which hinder the access of the 'invisible' children to the social services (%)

Factor	Value
Lack of financial resources	75
Lack of human resources	51
No collaboration / poor collaboration with the members of the beneficiary family	42
Lack of community services	25
Legislation and bureaucracy	23
No collaboration / poor collaboration between the local actors who should solve the cases	7
Another cause, specify...	9
Don't know	4
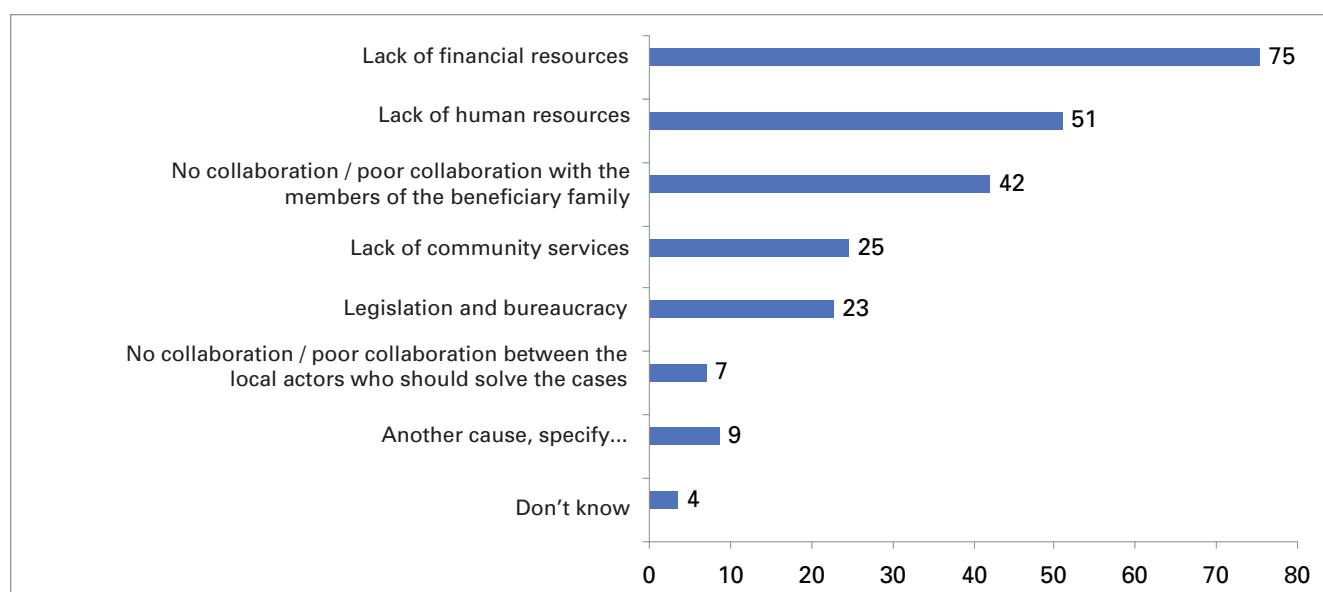
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=57.

The hampering factors vary from one county to another. However, due to the small number of cases a solid analysis is not possible. Just as indicative information: the lack of financial resources is not mentioned in Vrancea, the lack of human resources is the unique obstacle in Buzău, lack of community services is a problem in Botoşani and Vaslui, and the poor collaboration with the potential beneficiary is seen as obstacle only in Neamţ and Iaşi.

Expectedly, the insufficient budget is claimed to hamper access of the 'invisible' children to services particularly in the underdeveloped communes (91% compared to 65% in the developed communes). The insufficient of human resources is more frequently mentioned in communes internal social worker (75% versus 41%), while the lack of community services is a problem in communes with external social worker (34% versus 0%).

Relation with the social worker employed in the project

Nearly all respondents know who is the social worker employed in the project (95%) and provide the correct name. Actually, 83% of respondents did collaborate directly with the social worker engaged in the project, irrespective the individual or community characteristics.

In most cases the collaboration involved a variety of actions such as: provide various necessary data (83%), inform the social worker about new cases at risk (70%), evaluate the situation of some identified cases (57%), monitoring some identified cases (57%), and identify solutions for some 'invisible' children (51%).

Relation with the county supervisor

95% of respondents know who the county supervisor is, but only 56% of them met and/or collaborated with him/her. In this respect there are significant differences on several dimensions. The proportion of community representatives who worked/collaborated with the county supervisors is significantly lower in Neamț (only 19%).

Figure A5. 7 From the start of the project did you meet/collaborate with the project supervisor on behalf of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection? (%)
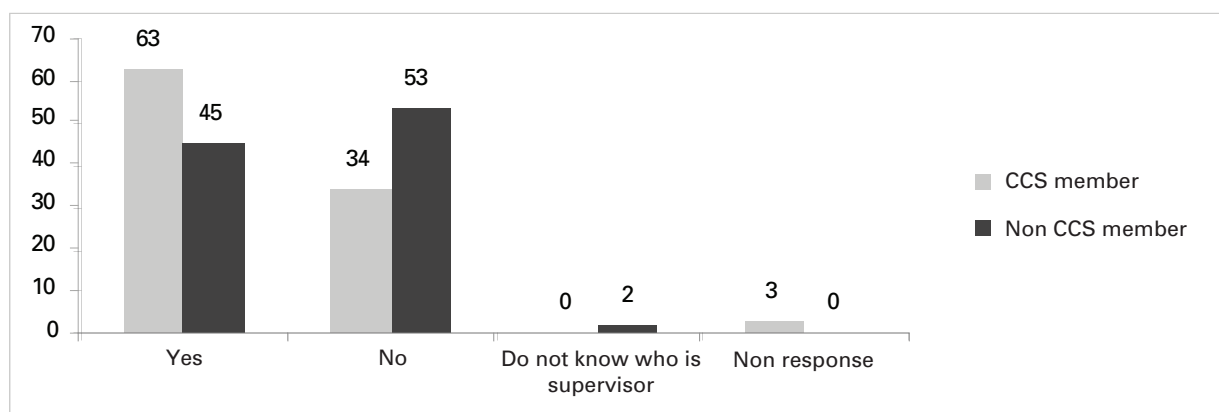
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The local decision-makers collaborated with the county supervisors in a significantly larger share than the other stakeholders (82% versus 42%), especially the medical staff, sanitary mediators, priests, economic agents and Roma mediators. As well, the CCS members have a much more intense relation with the supervisor (figure A 5.7).

Collaboration between stakeholders

The results of the opinion survey picture a 'very good' or 'good' collaboration both at the local level and between the local and the county levels. The results of the focus group discussions and interviews with all these actors, however, nuance the picture and indicate a clear bias towards social desirability of the survey data.

The community representatives evaluate the collaboration with the social worker employed in the project as 'very good', with an average value of 3.5 on a scale from 1 – 'very bad' to 4 – 'very good'. The assessment is significantly less positive in Neamț (average value of 2.4). On the other hand, the evaluation is better in the communes with internal social workers (average 3.7 compared to 3.4 for communes with external social workers). **Thus, a social worker integrated in the mayoralty structure is more likely to collaborate 'better' at least with the other institutional stakeholders.**

Figure A5. 8 Assessment of the collaboration with the project stakeholders
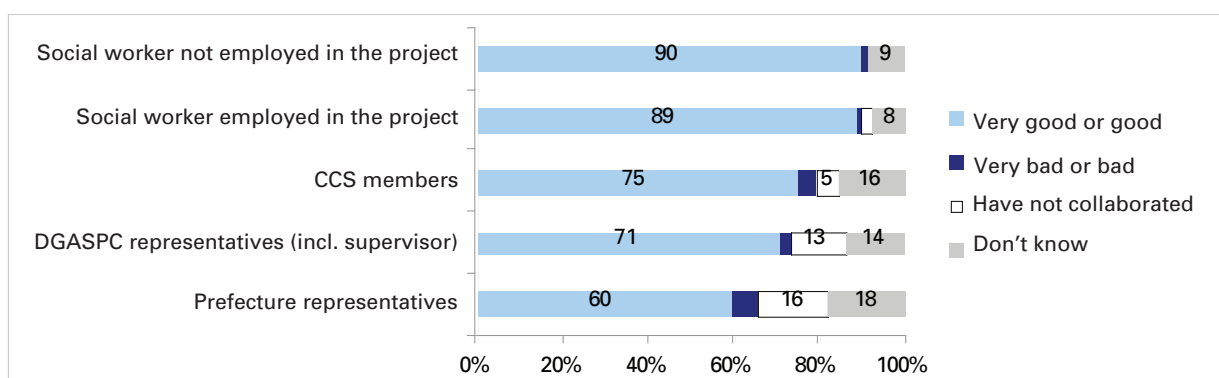
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

Collaboration with the social worker not employed in the project is 'good' in all counties. The best collaboration is reported in Vaslui and Botoșani. The lowest values (which however are 'good') are recorded in Neamț. The CCS members, particularly men, tend to be highly positive with regard to this work relation (average 3.5 *versus* 3.2 for non CCS members).

Collaboration with the CCS members varies significantly from rather 'bad' in Neamț to 'very good' in Bacău and Buzău (figure A 5.9). The evaluation is much better in the communes with internal social worker (3.5 *versus* 3), irrespective of the category of stakeholders that evaluates.

Figure A5. 9 Assessment of the collaboration with CCS members and with DGASPC representatives by county
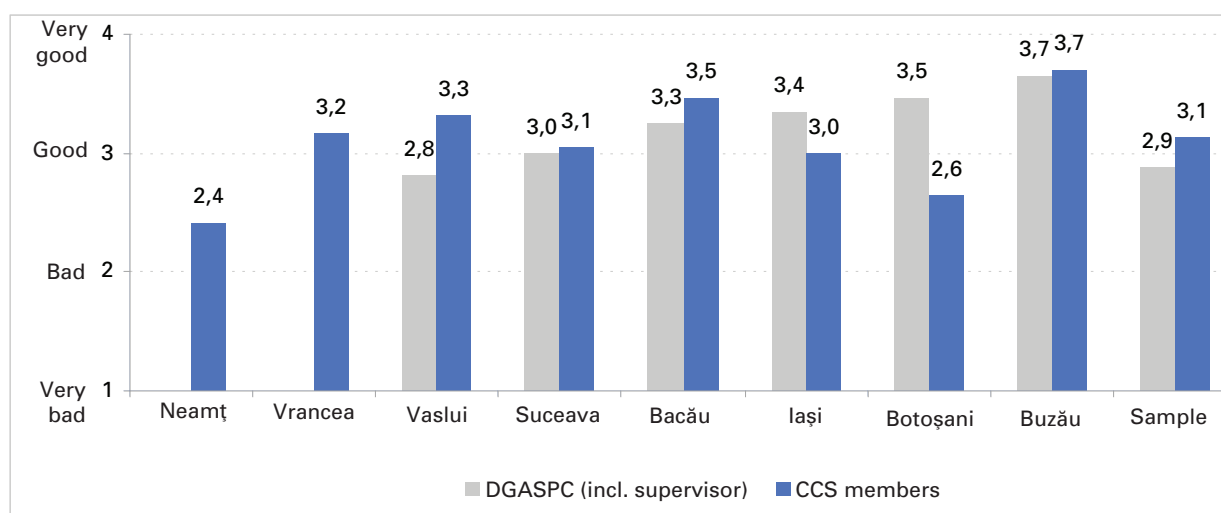
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=141, for the CCS members and N=144, for DGASPC. Notes: The figure presents average values by county based on a scale from 1 – 'very bad' and 4 – 'very good'. In Neamț and Vrancea the majority of respondents (over a half) declared that did not collaborate with the DGASPC.

The cooperation with the DGASPC representatives is less frequent (don't collaborate – 13% and non response 14%). A better situation is declared in Buzău and Botoșani (figure A 5.9). Among all categories of local stakeholders the decision-makers have the best evaluation of the relation with the DGASPC representatives.

Similar results are obtained regarding the collaboration with the Prefecture representatives. Actually, in most cases, problems identified during the project are discussed and solved at the local level. Only when the solution is not possible at the local level, they ask assistance from the county institutions.

The involvement of all local and county institutions in the project is perceived as 'high' or 'very high'. **Off all institutions involved, the mayoralty plays the most important role**, which is consistent with the information provided by the social workers employed in the project (figure A 5.10).

Figure A5. 10 Perceived involvement of the local and county institutions in the project so far
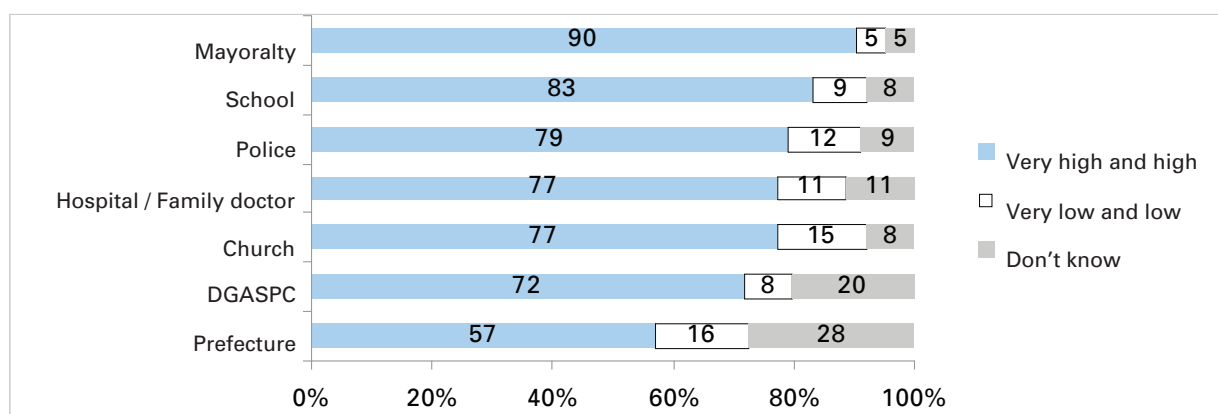
Data: Opinion survey, UNICEF, November 2011. N=167.

The respondents from Neamț expressed the most critical opinions. According to the community representatives, in Neamț, the involvement of mayoralties, schools and DGASPC was lower than in all other counties. The other key variables are not relevant.

7.5.2 Questionnaire with results

Helping the invisible children

Questionnaire number |__|__|__|__|__|__|

October 2011

Commune	Interview operator
....	Name...
County	Signature..
....	Date of interview: |__|__| |__|__| 2011

A) Level of project knowledge

A1. Did you know that project "Helping the invisible children" is running in your commune?

	Yes	No
	94,6%	5,4%

A2. How much do you know of this project?

	Very much	Much	Little	Very little	DK/NR
	31,3%	47,3%	12%	0,6%	9%

A3. Please tell me what you know about this project.

_____

B) Project presentation

Project 'Help the invisible children' is financed by UNICEF Romania and it runs in 2011-2012, in 96 communes, from 8 counties in Moldova region. The general objective of the project is to heighten the impact of the social protection policies for those children (and their families) who are in the position of being socially excluded ("invisible"). To this purpose, social workers have been employed in the communities included in the project and several social services will be provided: identification of vulnerable children, evaluation and monitoring of their situation, facilitate their access to social services.

C) Initial state

C1. How do you evaluate the need for social assistance in your community?

	Very high	High	Low	Very low	DK/NR
	39,5%	56,9%	2,4%	0,6%	0,6%

C2. Which are the phenomena/ processes that affect adversely the situation of the children in your community? (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)		
	1. High poverty level	73,7%
	2. Lack of jobs for parents	88%
	3. Parents going abroad for work	65,3%
	4. Working children	28,1%
	5. Cases of child abuse and/or child neglect	26,9%
	6. High rate of school absenteeism or dropout	28,1%
	7. Difficult access to medical services	16,8%
	8. Other, specify.....	0,6%
	9. DK/NR	1,8%

C3. How do you evaluate the performance of the institutions from your commune in terms of supporting the needs of children?	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad	DK/NR
1. Mayoralty	46,1%	49,7%	1,2%	0,6%	2,4%
2. School	31,7%	61,7%	0,6%	1,2%	4,8%
3. Church	25,1%	61,7%	6,6%	0%	6,6%
4. Hospital/ dispensary/ family doctor	21%	64,7%	7,8%	0,6%	6%
5. Police	28,1%	61,1%	4,2%	1,2%	5,4%

D) Project implementation in community

D1. Was there a process of information within your community regarding the start and running of the project 'Help the invisible children'?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	89,2%	9%	1,8%

If YES at D1 — D1.1 How was the information performed?		
	1. Posters	37,6%
	2. Public meetings	35,6%
	3. The children were informed at school	43%
	4. Only representatives of commune institutions were informed	43%
	5. Only the CCS representatives were informed	18,1%
	6. Other, specify...	14,1%

D2. Are you a member of the Consultative Community Structure from your commune?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	61,1%	35,9%	3%

D3. After the project started in your community, did the frequency of the CCS meetings increase?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	58,7%	30,5%	10,8%

D4 From the start of the project, did you participate in meetings/discussions with other local actors with the view to identify/evaluate/solve some cases of vulnerable children?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	71,3%	22,2%	6,6%

D5. Do you know cases of vulnerable children that were identified during the project?	Yes	No	No cases were identified	DK/NR
	76%	19,2%	3,6%	1,2%

If YES at D5

D5.1 How many cases of vulnerable children? |_|_|_| cases

D5.2. For how many cases of vulnerable children identified during the project, did your employing institution provide actual support to solve the problem? |_|_|_| cases

D6. Are there cases of vulnerable children identified during the project for which it was not yet possible to provide access to social services?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	34,1%	62,3%	3,6%

If YES to D6

D6.1. The problems which hindered the access to services of social assistance for the indentified cases pertain to:

(MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

1. Lack of financial resources	75,4%
2. Lack of human resources	50,9%
3. Lack of services	24,6%
4. Legislation and bureaucracy	22,8%
5. Lack of/poor collaboration between the local actors who should solve the cases	7%
6. Lack of/poor collaboration with the members of beneficiary families	42,1%
7. Another cause, specify....	8,8%
9. DK/NR	3,5%

D7. Do you know who is employed as social worker in this project?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	95,2%	4,8%	-

If YES at D7

D7.1 Please tell us the name of the social worker ....

E) Collaboration between the local and county actors involved in the project

E1. Did you collaborate directly with the social assistant employed in the project?	Yes	No	DK/NR
	82,6%	16,2%	1,2%

If YES at E1

E1.1 For what kind of activities did you collaborate with the social worker?

(MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

1. Provide information necessary to the social worker	82,6%
2. Inform the social worker about new cases of vulnerable children within the community	69,6%
3. Evaluate the situation of some identified vulnerable children	57,2%
4. Monitoring cases which were identified during the project	56,5%
5. Identifying solutions for vulnerable cases	51,4%
6. Facilitating the access to social services for the vulnerable children or for their families, such as....	8,7%
7. For another reason, specify ...	3,6%

E2. From the start of the project did you meet/ collaborate with the project supervisor on behalf of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection?	Yes	No	Don't know who is the supervisor (Do not read!)	DK/NR
	56,3%	40,7%	0,6%	2,4%

E3. How do you evaluate your collaboration during the project with:	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad	Didn't collaborate	DK/NR	NA
1. Social worker employed in the project	52,7%	35,9%	0,6%	0,6%	2,4%	7,8%	
2. Social worker from the mayoralty	26,9%	34,1%	0,6%	0,6%	0%	6%	31,7%
3. CCS* members	31,7%	43,1%	3,6%	0,6%	5,4%	15,6%	
4. DGASPC** representatives	31,7%	38,9%	2,4%	0%	13,2%	13,8%	
5. Prefecture representatives	21%	38,9%	6%	0%	16,2%	18%	

*CCS–Community Consultative Structure   **DGASPC – General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection

E4. How do you evaluate the role/ involvement so far of the following institutions in the project?	Very high	High	Low	Very low	DK/NR
1. Mayoralty	57,5%	32,9%	4,8%	0%	4,8%
2. School	34,7%	48,5%	8,4%	0,6%	7,8%
3. Church	26,9%	50,3%	13,8%	1,2%	7,8%
4. Hospital/ dispensary/family doctor	25,7%	51,5%	11,4%	0%	11,4%
5. Police	28,7%	50,3%	10,8%	1,2%	9%
6. DGASPC	40,1%	31,7%	6%	1,8%	20,4%
7. Prefecture	17,4%	39,5%	11,4%	4,2%	27,5%

F) Project potential impact at community level

F1. To what extent do you think that this project answers the needs of your commune?	Very large extent	Large extent	Small extent	Very small extent	Not at all	DK/NR
	33,5%	52,1%	9%	1,8%	-	3,6%

As a result of this project in your commune, to what extent …	Very large extent	Large extent	Small extent	Very small extent	Not at all	DK/NR
F2. Is there a change for the better of the adults' attitude towards the children?	8,4%	63,5%	19,8%	1,8%	1,8%	4,8%
F3. The situation of the vulnerable children from your commune will improve?	11,4%	62,9%	15%	4,2%	1,8%	4,8%
F4. The services preventing the separation of the children from their families will develop/ improve?	13,8%	58,7%	16,8%	4,2%	2,4%	4,2%
F5. The project activities will be assumed and continued by the local authorities and/or CCS after the project conclusion?	13,8%	55,1%	12,6%	4,2%	0,6%	13,8%
F6. The social worker employed in the project will remain within the mayoralty with the same responsibilities?	18%	29,9%	7,8%	3%	12,6%	28,7%

*CCS– Consultative Community Structure

7.6 Helping the Invisible Children, report for selection of communities

(Section 1 – Bibliographical Information)

Title: Helping the Invisible Children

Authors: Manuela Sofia Stănculescu (coord.), Monica Marin, Cristi Moisoiu

Date: 2011

Region: CEE/CIS

Country: Romania

Type: Study

Theme: Selection of rural communities with children in vulnerable situations from eight counties, for implementing activities of the CBS programme

(Section 2 — Summary)

Background

The project is part of UNICEF's Community Based Services (CBS) programme in Romania. The CBS focus is on the preventive approach in social protection system, especially in rural areas. The chore of the present project, as part of the larger CBS programme, consists in developing institutional capacity to provide social assistance prevention services in rural area, by employing social workers in 100 most vulnerable communities (communes), in an area of eight counties, most of them located in a poorly developed Romania's region - North-East. The list of counties includes: Bacău, Botoșani, Buzău, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui and Vrancea. A series of social assistance services will be provided at community level after selection and training of professionals. In order to identify and select 'the most vulnerable' 100 communes, the current project has elaborated a specific selection methodology.

Purpose/Objective

The project aims to substantiate the selection of communes to be involved in the programme on provision of social assistance at community level. The question guiding the selection process has been to identify those communities where on the one hand, the project is mostly needed in terms of social vulnerabilities and, on the other hand, the project has increased success opportunities, mainly related to the mayoralty's attitude towards social problems. A series of appropriate indicators have been developed for this purpose.

Methodology

The methodology consists of:

(Step 1)   theoretical selection, including:

- desk research for identifying the most appropriate indicators reflecting social vulnerabilities at community level;

- secondary data analysis of official statistics (National Statistical Office) as well as of data collected by previous research;

- theoretical selection of communes based on the statistical indicators identified in the previous steps;

(Step 2)   selection was refined by using data at the commune level, regarding 2010-2011 (March), which were collected in each county from three institutions: County Inspectorate for Education, Directorate of Public Health and the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection;

(Step 3)   field validation of the theoretical selection by triangulating the quantitative data with qualitative information obtained through interviews with the key county stakeholders (General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection - DGASPC and Prefecture);

(Step 4)   final selection of communities based on all collected information.

The desk research and secondary data analysis identified three groups of variables as the best fit to guide the selection process, as follows (see figure A 6.1):

a.   Social risk factors index, which was computed based on the Community Development Index[65] and a Local Economy Development Index

b.   Index of the mayoralty's attitude towards social problems

c.   Share of children in commune's population.

All data used for computing these indexes were included in an SPSS database, for all 656 communes from the eight counties.

By definition, in the step of theoretical selection, the selected communes: (1) have a high share of children in the total population, (2) benefit of a mayoralty oriented towards the social problems and, simultaneously, (3) have a high level of social risk factors, meaning a relatively low level of social and economic development.

The theoretical selection produced a list of 136 communes from all eight counties. However, there are significant inter-county disparities regarding the number of selected communes, which simultaneously satisfy the three specific requirements of the definition. This considerable variation is mainly caused by the dimension of social risk factors.

The limitations of the methodology used in the step of theoretical selection come from two main sources: (1) a focus on rather general social vulnerabilities instead of the specific children vulnerabilities, due to constraints of data availability; (2) a 'weak' measure of the mayoralty's attitude towards social problems. As solution to the lack of data in this regard, we relied on a census of mayoralties (Soros Foundation)[66], carried out in December 2009. As indicator we considered whether the mayoralty responded to this research. Thus, if a mayoralty did not respond to the census, the commune was automatically excluded from the selection process. This indicator may not represent the very best that can be aspired to, but it does establish a level below which the participation and attitudes of the mayoralty representatives is a liability and not a resource for the project. Finally, it should be said that most data deployed for the selection of communes, although the latest available, were derived from statistics or surveys from 2006-2008.

[65] Sandu, Voineagu şi Panduru (2009) *Dezvoltarea comunelor din România*, http://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/.
[66] *Local Authorities Access to European Funds* (2009) research financed by the Soros Foundation Romania. Research conducted by a consortium formed of CERME, ICCV and CNPS-INS. The response rate was almost 94%.

Figure A6. 1 Data and methods used for the theoretical selection of communes

PRIMARY INDICATORS	FIRST AGGREGATION LEVEL	SECOND AGGREGATION LEVEL	Selected communes (method 1)	Selected communes (method 2)
			Compared to all the 656 communes from eight counties, the selected communes (1) are simulatenously fulfiling the following conditions	Compared to the cmmunes from their own county, the selected communes (2) are simultaneously fulfiling the following conditions:
1 Educational stock at community level (Census 2002)	IDC at commune level — Community Development Index (D. Sandu, 2010) — Factor Score	Social Risk factors — Factor Score	High level — Relatively low level for IDC and IDEL	High level — Relatively low level for IDC and IDEL
2 Average age of persons older than 14 years (INS, 2008)				
3 Life expectancy at birth (INS, 2006-2008)				
4 Vehicles per 1000 inhabitants(2007)				
5 Average area of dwelling (2008)				
6 Gas consumption per inhabitant (2008)				
7 Size and residency category of locality				
8 Share of employees in the population of 15 years and older (INS, 2008)	IDEL at commune level — Local Economy Development Index — Factor Score			
9 Local budget own revenues per inhabitant (MFP, 2008)				
10 Share of own revenues in the total local budget own revenues (MFP, 2008)				
11 Number of public personnel specialized in social assistance working in projects on vulnerable groups or social inclusion	IAP at commune level — Index of mayoralty's attitude towards social problems — Factor Score	Mayoralty's attitude towards social problems — Factor score	Medium-high level	Medium-high level
12 Mayoralty offers voluntarily services, facilities, suppport for disadvantaged groups, other than the national programs such as the Minimun Guaranteed Income or the heating subsidies				
13 Share of children (0-14 years) in the total population (INS, 2010)	KIDSPO — Score	Share of children — Score	Medium-high level	Medium-high level

Note:
Initial selection was based on method 1, that is the position against all other communes from the eight counties.
However, method 2 was also applied because some counties had too few communes selected initially (see table A 6.1).
Sources: Locality File (National Institute for Statistics), data regarding the execution of local budgets in 2008 (Ministry of Public Finance), a census[67] of mayoralties conducted in December 2009, and the database of the Community Development Index.[68]

[67] *Local Authorities Access to European Funds* (2009) research financed by the Soros Foundation Romania. Research conducted by a consortium formed of CERME, ICCV and CNPS-INS. The response rate was almost 94%.
[68] Sandu, Voineagu și Panduru (2009) *Dezvoltarea comunelor din România*, http://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/.

127

Table A6. 1 Distribution of the communes by county after the first step of selection

	All communes (number)	Communes selected in the first step Theoretical selection			Total selected % of all communes (%)
		Method 1 (number)	Method 2 (number)	Total selected (method 1 & 2) (number)	
Bacău	85	14	15	16	19
Botoşani	71	25	11	25	35
Buzău	82	0	8	8	10
Iaşi	93	15	12	15	16
Neamţ	78	5	8	8	10
Suceava	98	5	10	10	10
Vaslui	81	30	19	38	47
Vrancea	68	6	16	16	24
Total	**656**	**100**	**99**	**136**	**21%**

Note: The methods for theoretical selection as explained in figure A 6.1.

In the second step, we confronted the results of the theoretical selection with information provided by DGASPC, School Inspectorates and Public Health Departments regarding the number of children in difficulty[69] reported (administratively), for each commune, in the period 2010-2011 (March). In most cases (over 70%), the communes selected through the theoretical method recorded also a higher number of children in various difficult situations. However, the overlap between the theoretical model based on socio-economic indicators and the 'casuistry' of children in social protection was only partial. Thus, there were both communes with high levels of risk factors and no case of reported child vulnerability and communes with low index of risk factors where 'casuistry' was significant.

The third step[70] consisted in field validation of the theoretical selection (already refined with administrative data on child vulnerabilities). Validation was achieved by triangulating the quantitative data with qualitative information obtained through interviews with the key county stakeholders - DGASPC and Prefecture. Interviews were carried out in all eight counties. The position of the interviewed institutional representatives varied from General Director and Chief of Service, in the case of DGASPC, to Chief of Office and Chief of Roma Programs, in the case of Prefecture. The interviews started with a concise presentation on the selection methods as well as of the results for their county (a nominal list of the communes resulted from the theoretical selection). They were asked to comment the results, with the possibility to add or exclude one or more communes (also giving the reasons for their proposal).

The interviews with Prefecture representatives did not add substantial information. Regardless of county, the Prefecture representatives have rather an overview, without knowing in depth the problems of a given commune. The stimulus of 'social problems' led, in most cases, to associations with: 'a large community of Roma', 'widespread poverty' or 'old people living alone with very low pensions'. The child related issues are poorly known, 'for such information, you should ask DGASPC, they know better'. Relations with the mayors appear as being shaped by

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[69] E.g. abandoned children, minor mothers, cases of child abuse, neglect, school dropout, severely disabled children etc.
[70] The second and the third steps of selection overlapped at a certain extent because institutions from some counties delayed sending the administrative data. Therefore the relation theoretical selection - administrative data was analyzed, in some counties, together or even after the interviews with the county stakeholders.

the political affiliation ('at power' or 'in opposition'). However, in all counties, the Prefecture representatives confirmed most results of the theoretical selection (over 80%), but also proposed communes for inclusion in/ exclusion from the county list. Nevertheless, their proposals were based on a wide range of reasons, without a dominant pattern or a specific logic.

In contrast, DGASPC was a real partner in selecting the communes. Firstly, they commented on the selected communes and identified those without child specific vulnerabilities. These were excluded the first. For instance, some communes located in the mountains, particularly the isolated ones, have poor infrastructure and aged population in many villages. Consequently, although they have a high index of social risks, the specific social problems are not linked to child protection issues. Secondly, regarding the communes with medium-high factor risks and child vulnerabilities, the DGASPC representatives worked with three criteria of exclusion/ inclusion: (1) 'casuistry' of children in need of protection; (2) volume and quality of human resources from the local SPAS (lack or insufficient social workers, unqualified social workers etc.); and (3) the professional relation between DGASPC and mayoralty (especially the mayor). This third criterion worked in both senses, some counties conditioned the selection of the existence of a 'reliable' and 'cooperating' mayor (with whom they have already built a good collaboration relation), while other counties saw the project as an opportunity to improve their relation with some mayoralties. This was a strategic choice, which has reflected the management style promoted at the DGASPC level in each county.

Most DGASPC proposed the inclusion of communes with rich 'casuistry' and/or with poor local capacity to deal with social problems, particularly related to children. However, the decision process was rather difficult considering that the relation between children 'casuistry' and SPAS human resources is equivocal. On the one hand, 'casuistry' is expected to be lower as the SPAS capacity to tackle social problems is higher. On the other hand, a small number of reported cases may reflect a reduced level of institutional capacity for identifying vulnerabilities, rather than a community with a low level of child protection needs. The number of cases may be small because they are not identified and reported by unqualified or indifferent social workers, and not because they would be timely addressed by professional and dedicated social workers. Thus, the process of selection/ validation at the DGASPC level, although much more structured than in the Prefecture case, incorporates substantial subjectivity, precisely due to the lack of performance indicators and the underdeveloped mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation within the current social protection system, particularly at the local level.

Finally, data were triangulated. Figure A 6.2 shows the results. Out of the 136 communes selected in step 1 (theoretical selection), 83 communes (61%) were validated and entered the final selection (step 4). Actually, the number of communes theoretically selected, which were validated both by DGASPC and Prefecture representatives, was higher. However, as shown in the figure below, some communes from Vaslui and Botoşani, although validated, were excluded, given the limited budget of the project.

Figure A6. 2 Distribution of the results of selection process by county (number of communes)
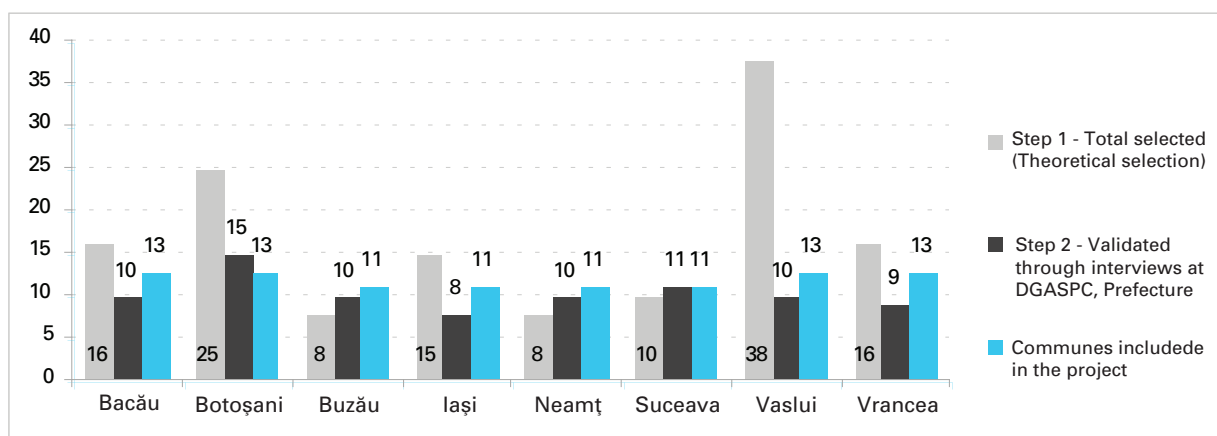
Note: Theoretical method used for the selection of communes as explained in figure A 6.1. Overall, 136 communes were theoretically selected, of which 83 were validated through interviews.

Some communes proposed by the county stakeholders have been also included, besides the validated communes. DGASPC provided most proposals, out of which only a part were validated by the Prefecture representatives. Also, these communes have not met the theoretical conditions. A good example is Jariștea (Vrancea), which is a developed commune but with a large casuistry of vulnerable children, related to casual workers in the vineyard (some of whom are children).

In the fourth step, UNICEF together with DGASPC performed the final selection. 96 communes were included in the project.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The model used for theoretical selection of communes has proved to produce reliable results in all eight counties.

The interviews carried out with the key county stakeholders show a rather positive attitude towards project implementation, with a significant difference in information, interest and expertise between DGASPC and Prefecture. The project clearly targets DGASPC institutional mission and offers a valuable opportunity for supplementing either the organizational scheme or the skills of the persons in charge with social assistance at locality level. The Prefecture's prior expertise is based on social risks related to the Roma specific problems and their validation has been partially influenced by this. The role assumed by the Prefectures is that of facilitating communication with the mayors in each selected community. However, the role played by both DGASPC and Prefecture in the future programme implementation strongly depends, in varying degrees, by the openness of the institutional leading position - General Director or Prefect.

Field validation results do not include a clear commitment of the selected mayoralty to be part of the programme. Still, the project will most likely highly depend on the actual long-term commitment shown by the Mayor of each selected commune and therefore, the number of excluded communes might increase as the project unfolds.